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ABSTRACT

This publication contains four papers that identify issues within the adult and community education (ACE) sector. "Overview" (Annie Campbell, Peter Thomson) considers what defines ACE; who offers ACE programs; who participates in ACE programs and who does not participate; what are the barriers to participation; who is responsible for ACE; and what does the national policy say. "Who Uses ACE: Future Demand" (Martina Nicolls) assesses the supply of ACE and main factors that shape the total volume and character of supply and providers' capabilities; identifies major inequalities of supply and reasons; summarizes factors that shape and limit demand for adult education and training (AET); and identifies demand-side policy interventions to "widen participation." "Lifelong Learning in ACE" (Michael Sachsse) explores lifelong learning, considers ACE's role in making it a reality for all Australians, and looks at how ACE has evolved, underlying principles, and the extent to which they accord with those embodied in ACE. "Community in ACE" (Peter Norman) examines the scope, structure, and culture of community-owned and managed adult education in each Australian State and Territory; its features; the impact on ACE of changes in the education and training environment; and the value of community-owned and managed ACE in promoting learning. "Widening Participation in ACE" (Michael Sachsse) articulates issues in efforts to widen participation in ACE to include underrepresented groups, including identification, characteristics, and barriers to participation. Appendixes contain 95 references and a list of acronyms. (YLB)

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ACE – some issues

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ACE—some issues

Edited by
Annie Campbell &
Penelope Curtin

Prepared by
National Centre for Vocational Education Research
for the Australian National Training Authority

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The intention of this document is to foster discussion around issues pertinent to Adult and Community Education (ACE). The papers should not be taken as inferring a particular direction in public policy concerning Adult and Community Education. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and the project team and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian National Training Authority or the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) ACE Taskforce.

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Preface

This publication has been produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) with funding provided by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to research issues in the adult and community education (ACE) sector.

The National Policy: Adult Community Education (MCEETYA 1997) has as its first goal the realisation of the potential of ACE. This it proposes to achieve through maintaining and enhancing support for ACE, consolidating the notion of quality within it, and ensuring its successful promotion.

To this end, this project was funded by the ANTA National ACE Program to research issues in adult and community education that were identified by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) ACE Taskforce. Four issues papers were commissioned, on the following topics:

- Who uses ACE: Future demand
- Lifelong learning and ACE
- Community in ACE
- Widening participation in ACE

ACE: Some issues forms the most comprehensive collection of papers compiled to identify issues, raise debate and inform the work being undertaken within the adult and community education sector.

The contributors of the papers examined the considerable body of relevant literature and reports that have been produced recently. The review of the literature was undertaken in parallel with consultations with selected ACE stakeholders from the States and Territories. The consultations were in part aimed at determining the stakeholders' understanding of, and support for, the four topics. They were also aimed at gathering suggestions regarding strategies that should be adopted by the ACE sector to further the ideals described in the 1997 National Policy Adult and Community Education.

The issues papers have been reproduced in chapters two to five of this publication; the first chapter gives an overview of the suite of papers.

Acknowledgements

The four papers reproduced in this publication were written with the guidance and support of the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce Steering Committee. The commitment of the Steering Committee to providing assistance with the complexities of the topics was much appreciated. In particular, the contribution made by Sam Thomas and Helen Macrae to this project is acknowledged. Acknowledgement is also extended to those stakeholders and practitioners who shared their views and comments with the contributors, thereby assisting with the development of the papers.

The contributors are grateful for the support received from the members of the project steering committee. These are:

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Contributors

Ms Annie Campbell & Mr Peter Thomson	Overview
Ms Martina Nicolls	Who uses ACE: Future demand
Mr Michael Sachsse	Lifelong learning and ACE
	Widening participation in ACE
Mr Peter Norman	Community in ACE

The papers were edited by Ms Annie Campbell and Ms Penelope Curtin.

Mr Paul Davies provided valuable advice to the project team.

The administrative support provided by Ms Tracey Jackson is also acknowledged.

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1 Overview

Adult and community education

Adult education worldwide has a long and proud history of over one hundred years but, for reasons both historical and political, adult and community education (ACE) in Australia is diverse and is not easily defined. One of the hallmarks of the sector is its ability to respond to local needs, creating diversity in both the programs offered and their mode of delivery. The level of community participation, the nature of the provider and the sources of income also vary between States and Territories. While attempts to define ACE or to collect consistent and meaningful statistical data present a challenge, those within the sector generally agree that its diversity is a strength rather than a weakness.

One way of understanding adult and community education is to see it as a fourth sector of Australian education. The breakdown of education by sectors relates to the four sources of instruction; that is:

- schools
- vocational education and training (VET) providers
- universities
- adult and community education centres

This is a good way to start thinking about ACE because it gives a focus on 'community', where the community can be either the local community, such as people in a small town or a large city, or a community of interest, such as people wanting to learn about computers.

Unfortunately, we cannot take the education sector idea too far before it creates difficulties. This is because many of the traditional boundaries within Australia's education system are becoming blurred. For example, many secondary schools now teach VET subjects, some TAFE colleges offer bachelor degrees and everybody, it seems, offers a form of ACE program. There is much repositioning under way in the sectors and it is all too easy to become constrained by definitions and thus lose sight of the significant national role that the ACE sector is ideally placed to take on.

ACE is organised in different ways in each State and Territory—which results in substantial differences in the breadth of coverage of the 'sector'. In most States and Territories ACE is program based and encompasses general adult education, basic adult education (literacy programs), English as a second language and a wide variety of vocational or further education programs such as computing, car mechanics, pottery and photography. This range of programs is available throughout the country, but, for administrative reasons, in New South Wales and Victoria ACE programs are provider based; that is, the term 'ACE' is applied only to education and training provided by incorporated, non-profit, community-managed associations.

In the four papers that follow, only one deals specifically with community-managed associations that provide ACE. The other three use the broader view of ACE, as is the case in this overview.

What defines ACE?

Given that a sector-based definition does not work effectively, the features and underlying principles that help to establish the boundaries of ACE need to be identified. These include:

- a tradition that the participants of ACE are involved in determining their learning needs and how they learn—in other words a *learner-centred approach*
- offering a suite of *diverse programs*, from basic literacy through vocational preparation to general adult education
- making use of a *wide range of providers*, from universities and TAFE institutions through schools and churches to community centres and neighbourhood houses
- making programs *easily accessible to all*, particularly to older Australians whose interests are not a priority of the other education sectors

The 1991 Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE) report, *Celebrate the difference*, (AAACE 1991, pp. 24–25) identified 'four broad areas of adult and community education. These areas are adult basic education, general or liberal education, job and occupational education and training and public education', which are defined as follows:

- *adult basic education* includes 'literacy, numeracy, communication skills, basic science, humanities, social sciences, and so on, up to year 10 . . .'
- *general or liberal education* is:

  > *. . . that which is undertaken primarily for personal enrichment and development, general interest, or recreation, including programs that help people to realise their full potential and become well informed about key issues confronting society*
  > *. . . it is the first rung on the re-skilling/re-entry ladder for many, it contributes to positive community health, it addresses a whole range of health and safety issues, and it contributes towards an active, knowledgeable citizenry . . .*

- *job and occupational education and training* is seen to include not only the narrowly focussed job skills but also:

  > *. . . more skilful, attitudes and behaviours . . . Education in such social skills as assertion, stress management, and conflict resolution can also make an important contribution to organisational effectiveness . . .*

- *public education* includes:

  > *. . . campaigns to change attitudes and behaviour of the public at large, for instance in campaigns on health . . . or environment . . . It also includes the public education responsibilities of institutions such as museums, libraries and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation . . .*

The common feature here is not an organisational or legal status, but an involvement in adult learning. The rich tradition of ACE carries with it a vision for lifelong learning and a commitment to 'learner centredness' and empowerment, together with a practice of dedicated effort in circumstances where adult education was given less recognition and credibility than it is today.

Clearly ACE embodies a degree of flexibility that is most suited to the changing nature of education and training in Australia. One of the most striking features of the research reported in this publication was the passionate belief held by members of the ACE sector in the benefits of these programs to individuals and communities in Australia. The benefits can be broadly categorised as:

- the breadth and diversity of programs
- the valuable contribution they make to the quality of social and economic life

- the responsiveness of the sector to the needs of individuals and businesses

The role and vision for ACE in Australia is summarised in the National Policy: Adult Community Education (MCEETYA 1997):

> *The ACE sector can assist the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in developing a more flexible and comprehensive labour market, and in developing an informed citizenry and enhancing the cultural vitality of the nation.*

Who offers ACE programs?

The National Policy: Adult Community Education (MCEETYA 1997) states that ACE is available through a diverse range of institutions which include:

- adult and community education centres and colleges
- Workers' Educational Associations (WEAs)
- TAFE institutes
- neighbourhood houses and community centres
- churches and schools
- community health agencies and aged-care providers

Who participates in ACE programs?

For the purpose of collecting statistics, ACE provision is at present loosely divided into two main areas:

- general adult education (personal enrichment)
- vocational education

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) recently released a publication outlining the extent of personal enrichment programs in Australia (*Australian personal enrichment education and training program statistics 1996: An overview* (NCVER 1998b)). 'Personal enrichment' programs are those not specifically designed to lead to further education or employment.

In 1996:

- approximately 426 000 individuals undertook personal enrichment programs
- the majority (approximately 75 per cent) of these people were females
- almost 60 per cent of clients were located in capital cities

A survey commissioned by AAACE (1995) states that participants:

- were predominantly young and were employed
- were unlikely to be the poorest or the wealthiest Australians

However, any analysis of ACE participation based on statistical collections is problematic because so little data are collected, and funding arrangements and the definitions of ACE used in the States and Territories make the provision of accurate and comparable statistical data difficult. In 1996 participation in personal enrichment programs accounted for only 3.1 per cent (approximately) of the participation in VET programs. Others would argue that as much as 50 per cent of all courses offered in the ACE sector have vocational relevance, even though a small, but growing, proportion of these are formally accredited VET courses.

What we know, therefore, is that there is a real need for a more systematic approach to the collection of data in the sector. It is no longer appropriate to narrowly define 'adult education' as non-award, non-vocational education. Today, adult education can be as broad as is the range of disciplines, subjects, courses and skills: it encompasses vocational and non-vocational, formal and informal, accredited and non-accredited, and on-the-job and off-the-job learning. This issue will become increasingly important, as the trend in Australia and worldwide is for increased participation in ACE.

Who doesn't participate in ACE programs?

Recent investigations of the backgrounds of participants in ACE programs show the 'typical' ACE participant to be financially better off and better educated than the general population, female, employed in a skilled occupation and a committed lifelong learner, all of which suggests too narrow a focus by the sector.

By asking the question 'Which groups typically do not take ACE programs?' we find people who belong to such groups as:

- manual workers
- the unqualified
- the unemployed
- sole parents
- some ethnic communities
- older adults
- those with disabilities
- those with poor literacy levels
- ex-offenders
- the less well off
- the isolated

Twenty-seven per cent of school-leavers were not participating in any structured education or training at the time of the 1996 Census (ABS 1997a), but identifying those who do not participate in ACE is of little interest unless we know why this is so.

What are the barriers to participation?

The most commonly cited reasons for not becoming involved include:

- course fees and other expenses
- availability of courses (suitability, timing, distance)
- isolation (for example, geographic, language, institutional)
- confidence as learners
- program delivery and support
- personal support (for example, course information, child care)
- rate of achievement

Are there other influences?

There are several major trends that will impact on the way in which we live, work and relate in Australia in the future. They include:

- the ageing population
- unemployment
- changes to the labour market (for example, the move to temporary and part-time work)
- catering for a culturally diverse society
- increasing use of information technology (IT)

For example, the world's body of knowledge is currently doubling about every seven months. The rate of change in technology is also rapidly increasing. Australians are flocking to further education to upgrade their skills and qualifications. The unemployment of mature-age (45–55 years) and older (> 55 years) people is emerging as a major issue, particularly with the increased number of retrenched workers.

As influences such as these continue to challenge traditional concepts of 'once-and-for-all' learning, the imperative to embrace learning throughout life will be increasingly felt by all Australians.

Who is responsible for ACE?

The National Policy: Adult Community Education (MCEETYA 1997) provides a framework for the States and Territories, working with the Commonwealth, to develop strategies for ACE.

- The *Commonwealth's* role is mainly one of educational leadership, to promote a learning culture and to ensure that all Australians have access to education and training.
- The *Australian National Training Authority* supports ACE through the administration of national program funding, which includes funding for research and development projects, with advice from the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce, and the provision of support for the national co-ordination of Adult Learners' Week over the past three years.
- The functions of the *Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs* (MCEETYA) include co-ordination of strategic policy at the national level and development of national agreements within the Council's areas of responsibility.
- Implementation of the national policy on adult community education and support of ACE provision rests with each *State or Territory government*.

What does the national policy say?

In advancing goal 1, which seeks to 'realise the potential of ACE', the policy identifies the outcomes it seeks to achieve. These are to be achieved through the eight strategic objectives:

- maintaining and enhancing support for ACE
- consolidating quality in ACE
- promoting ACE
- enhancing the contribution of ACE to the social and cultural life of Australia
- enhancing the contribution of ACE to the world of work
- fostering inclusiveness

- ❖ providing learning pathways
- ❖ enhancing the learning opportunities available to adults

What has our research shown us?

Chapter 2 Who uses ACE: Future demand

The paper reproduced in chapter 2 considers the issues of supply and demand in ACE in Australia. It makes a broad assessment of the overall supply of ACE nationally and the main factors that shape the total volume and character of supply, as well as the capabilities of the providers. It identifies the major inequalities or inefficiencies of supply and the reasons for these. The factors that shape and limit demand for adult education and training are summarised from existing research. The paper identifies a range of demand-side policy interventions that are considered in the context of 'widening participation', and ways in which further research might assist in exploring the case for such policy interventions.

Chapter 3 Lifelong learning in ACE

The paper that comprises chapter 3 explores the concept of lifelong learning and considers the role ACE can play in making lifelong learning a reality for all Australians, thus helping them to become part of the much-discussed learning society. It looks at how lifelong learning has evolved, the principles that underpin it and the extent to which these principles accord with those embodied within ACE.

The following questions are addressed: If lifelong learning is so essential to the economic and cultural wellbeing of society, why is it only consumed by 25 to 30 per cent of the population? Who are the groups not participating? What characteristics, if any, do they have in common? Why are they not participating? What is the cost of non-participation to them, to the community and to government? What action needs to be taken to reach the non-participants? The paper identifies areas of research that will contribute to the development of a culture of learning.

Chapter 4 Community in ACE

A comprehensive overview of community-owned and managed adult education as it has been discussed in recent literature is provided in chapter 4. The paper develops an account of the scope, structure and culture of community-owned and managed adult education in each Australian State and Territory.

The features of community-owned and managed ACE are described and the impact on ACE of the changes in the education and training environment is examined. The paper stresses the value of community-owned and managed ACE in promoting learning for individuals and communities and the challenge to demonstrate to governments the economic and social value of ACE and the contribution it makes to the 'health' of the community.

Chapter 5 Widening participation in ACE

The paper reproduced in chapter 5 articulates the issues likely to be encountered in efforts to widen participation in adult education and training to include groups presently under-represented. Groups that are under-represented are identified and their characteristics described. The paper proposes strategies for addressing the barriers to participation and considers a range of options for extending the role of ACE. A set of research priorities is proposed that might assist in widening participation.

Themes that emerge across the papers

1 The ACE sector needs a funding arrangement that is shared between education authorities, employers, individuals and the government if it is to achieve the goals identified in the national policy. Further consideration of the distribution of funds across all post-compulsory educational sectors is required; in particular, research into cost analysis and distribution of funds.

2 The value of the ACE sector to the community in terms of its economic and social contribution needs to be quantified.

3 The ACE sector has demonstrated the ability to respond to diverse learning needs. There is a valuable role for ACE in serving the needs of:

- those interested in VET
- the ageing
- young people
- new markets

4 ACE has a role in furthering the lifelong learning agenda and thereby promoting this development of the learning society.

5 A national lifelong learning policy framework is required that will:

- focus on issues of equity
- facilitate increased participation
- establish a funding mechanism to promote lifelong learning

6 There is a need to support specific initiatives to promote lifelong learning, such as:

- *employer development programs and learning entitlements*. In order to achieve this goal, a review of taxation requirements that act as disincentives would be necessary.
- *learning cities*. Networks of learning cities not only further opportunities for individuals, but also they have the potential to integrate the economic and social development of communities.
- *Adult Learners' Week*
- *incentives for industry*

7 The development of information and guidance services is needed to fill the gaps that currently exist in the provision of career advice.

8 The collection of comprehensive data is necessary if the ACE sector is to obtain an accurate picture of participation and attitudes to learning.

9 The rapid development of information technology presents many challenges for the learner–provider interface and for the administration of the ACE sector. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is needed of the effects of IT advancements on program development and delivery.

10 Incentives are required to foster intersectoral collaboration, to ensure the development of dynamic relationships and pathways between providers in all education sectors, industry, peak agencies and research and other institutions.

11 Professional development and training is needed by both staff and volunteers in areas such as management and information technology.

12 Strategies are needed to encourage implementation of national policy; for example, negotiations between ACE stakeholders—Commonwealth, State and local—to set priorities and targets for the implementation of the national ACE policy.

2 Who uses ACE: Future demand

Executive summary

A renewed interest in the provision of adult education, the opening up of the training market and the widespread adoption of the principles of lifelong learning, coupled with the Commonwealth Government's stated commitment to a learning society, will position the adult and community education sector as a significant provider of post-secondary, general and vocational education for adult Australians.

ACE providers currently offer a broad range of services that are integrated and networked with many community services, particularly for people with multiple disadvantages. The ACE sector therefore presents an excellent model of integrated delivery and can effectively provide programs for all Australians.

Current national supply of adult and community education

Currently the extent of adult education in Australia is under-reported.

ACE offers three major types of provision:

- general adult education/personal enrichment non-accredited programs (Stream 1000)
- vocational programs (Streams 2000–4000)
- adult basic education comprising literacy, numeracy and communication skills

A fourth type of provision includes public education, which encompasses education and information designed to change people's attitudes to issues such as health, the environment and culture.

Statistics on the current national supply of adult and community education in Australia tend to be either an estimate of all types of provision, which can distort the representation of the actual extent, or specific to one type of provision, usually Stream 1000 personal enrichment programs.

The differing definitional, contextual and financial structures of ACE in each State and Territory, and the blurring distinction between vocational and non-vocational programs, make it difficult to determine the full extent of ACE provision.

Client profile in adult and community education programs

The general profile of Australians participating in adult learning indicates that they tend to be young, employed and educated, with males and females equally likely to undertake an ACE course. However, specific data on Stream 1000 personal enrichment programs indicate that 75 per cent of participants are female.

The employment statistics of adult learners indicate that they tend to be employed full time (38 per cent), to be professionals or para-professionals (52 per cent) and to have a degree (45 per cent). Those least likely to undertake an ACE course are not in the workforce (10 per cent) or are unemployed (12 per cent), and have no post-school qualifications (17 per cent) (AAACE 1995).

Participation in ACE is increasing worldwide. In Australia, the percentage of the population who have taken an ACE course at some time during their adult life has increased from

68 per cent in 1986 to 78 per cent in 1994. Adults are likely to undertake more than one course in their lifetime, with the average being five courses per adult (Evans 1995).

ACE need and demand in Australia

The major trends impacting on the potential provision of ACE are:

- the significant increase in the ageing population (65 years and older)
- the unemployment of mature-aged (45–55 years) and older (> 55 years) people due to the high rate of retrenchment
- the move to more temporary and part-time work
- the increase in information technology services and products
- the increase in numbers of volunteers and carers for the aged

The major learning opportunities for the aged will include recreation, employment and retirement programs. Specifically, they will comprise personal and self-development courses, vocational programs, skills for coping with a changing world (and new technologies), skills for carers and volunteer roles, and education for self-maintenance (such as financial planning and health education).

Funding issues for adult and community education

Investment in education generates economic growth. Future funding for adult education will depend on two major factors linked to the principles of lifelong learning:

- the fiscal policy of the governing authority for the spread of public money across all post-compulsory education sectors
- the governing authority's priority for lifelong learning

Two major funding initiatives are discussed in this paper: the voucher system and the individual learning accounts/entitlements system, both extensively debated in the United Kingdom. The learning accounts system has benefited from the shortcomings of the earlier voucher system; the learning accounts scheme takes some account of equity and access principles and the principles for lifelong learning, which makes it more comprehensive, flexible and collaborative than the earlier scheme. The learning accounts scheme incorporates the use of new and emerging technologies to open up access and expand student choice. It is also applicable across all sectors of post-compulsory education and views adult education as an important contributor to lifelong learning.

The UK learning accounts/entitlements scheme is based on user choice, where the responsibility for lifelong learning is shared between individuals, employers and the government, as well as by all post-compulsory education sectors. A variant of the individual learning account scheme is the franchise model, which extensively promotes non-formal adult education. While it is more applicable to the ACE sector, the model has not been debated in global forums. Nevertheless, an advantage of the franchise model for the government is that it can be implemented gradually, using partial subsidy (that is, partial individual learning entitlements/learning accounts) for non-formal education.

The ACE sector requires a funding arrangement that is consistent with the principles of lifelong learning and has intrinsic and extrinsic benefits for individuals, communities and nations. It requires a system based on informed user choice with shared financial responsibility between post-compulsory education authorities, employers, individuals and the government.

Further research

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1996b) advocates research into the monetary and non-monetary benefits of adult education. Research in this area is crucial, particularly in regard to the ageing global population, in order to determine the economic and social benefits of education to ensure well-informed, healthy and culturally and environmentally aware citizens. OECD thus recommends further research into cost analysis and the distribution of funds across all post-compulsory educational sectors to support lifelong learning.

Context and scope of the paper

This paper offers information relating to who uses ACE. It is intended to provoke discussion of issues relating to future ACE provision by examining questions such as: Is current ACE provision adequate and is it fairly and equitably distributed? Are current needs being met? What improvements, if any, should governments make to ACE provision? These are the kinds of 'supply and demand' issues that both State and Federal governments need to consider as we move into the next millennium, and which, if we get them right, will ensure that Australia maintains strong and competitive growth while supporting a harmonious and well-educated community.

The purpose of this paper on supply and demand in adult and community education is to inform research effort to ensure maximum effect in the development of practical strategies for widening participation to currently under-represented groups.

The brief encompasses the following:

- developing a conceptual framework for the consideration of issues of supply and demand in adult and community education in Australia which elucidates the distinction between supply-side and demand-side interventions
- making a broad assessment of the overall supply of adult and community education nationally, and the main factors which shape the total volume and character of supply and the capabilities of providers
- identifying any major inequalities on the inefficiencies of supply, and the reasons for these
- summarising, from existing research, what is currently known about the factors which shape, and limit, demand for adult education and training
- identifying a range of demand-side policy interventions that should be considered in the context of 'widening participation', and ways in which future research might assist in exploring the case for such policy interventions

Scope of paper

The scope of this paper is a very broad, inclusive and comprehensive consideration of adult and community education. It takes as a beginning point AAACE's (1992) advocacy of four broad, but overlapping, categories of adult and community education provision:

- *general (adult) education*—undertaken primarily for personal enrichment and general interest (traditionally Stream 1000); also referred to as liberal education
- *adult basic education*—encompassing literacy, numeracy, communication skills and basic education skills
- *vocational training*—career-related training, industry training, special purpose training for organisations, skills upgrades and vocational preparation (This is broad and can cover a range of Streams from 2000 to 4000.)

- *public education*—health, lifestyle, environmental education and campaigns designed to address and change public attitudes

Table 2.1 identifies the types of provision by various categories of ACE providers, such as formal educational institutions and community providers (AAACE 1992). Table 2.2 indicates where the providers concentrate their efforts; for example, the amount of adult basic education or vocational training taking place within each major provider. However, in determining the supply and demand of adult and community education in Australia, it should be stated that the data are limited in scope or representative of the scope as it is applied to particular States or Territories. Different funding arrangements and definitions of ACE in the States and Territories make the provision of accurate and comparable statistical data difficult.

Table 2.1: Adult education providers

Provider	Type of provision
Formal educational institutions	Schools, TAFE (i.e., Stream 1000 personal enrichment programs) and higher education (i.e., continuing education programs) in which participants predominantly pay full cost
Government departments and agencies	Such as departments that offer agricultural extension, marriage guidance counselling, advice to small business, health education or consumer affairs
Community providers	Such as learning centres and neighbourhood houses which offer community-owned and managed adult basic education and general interest programs
Private-sector providers of adult education and training	Usually small organisations and secretarial colleges
Labour market organisations (enterprises/unions, professional associations)	Includes employer organisations, industry training bodies, enterprises and unions

Table 2.2: Adult education and training: Major areas and provider sectors

	Adult basic education	General interest	Training/ vocational	Public education
Formal education	•••••	••	•••	•
Government departments and agencies	••		•••	•••••
Community providers	•••	••••	••	•
Private providers		•••••	•••••	
Enterprises/unions, professional associations	•		•••••	•

Source: AAACE 1992, 'Adult and community education in Australia: Mapping the field', in *Striking a balance: Adult and community education in Australia towards 2000*, eds R Harris & P Willis, Centre for Human Resource Studies, UniSA, Adelaide, p. 25.

Note: The * to ***** rating in this table gives an indication of where the five provider sectors each concentrate their effort. It does not indicate in any way the relative volume of effort of the different provider agencies.

Data limitations

Kelly and Goldsworthy (1993) highlight some major dilemmas in determining the scope of adult and community education for a nationally comparable statistical collection in Australia. These include factors such as:

- the multiplicity of bodies responsible for adult and community education
- the large number of non-government (private) groups

Documentation on the limitations of data related to ACE activity is extensive (Crombie 1996a, 1996b; McIntyre 1996a; OECD 1996b; Schofield et al. 1996). Aside from periodic national surveys and data collected by the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education, the national annual statistical collection (Australian Vocational Education and

Training Management Information Statistics Standard (AVETMISS)) is the main source of data on ACE. These data report only on ACE activity that is funded through ANTA.

The NCVER publishes the results of the annual collection in a series of publications (*Australian vocational education and training statistics*). The national statistical collection classifies publicly funded data according to three provider types:

- TAFE and other government providers
- community education providers
- private providers

Due to the different funding arrangements in each State and Territory (table 2.8), the scope of the data collection is diverse. Table 2.3 shows the sources of ACE statistics reported in the national collection in 1997.

Table 2.3: Sources of reported ACE statistics in 1997

Provider type*	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA
ACE centres		√			√		√	
Adult secondary			√					
AMES						√	√	
Community access		√			√		√	
TAFE		√		√	√		√	√
Universities			√					
Public ACE providers	√					√		

Source: Unpublished data, NCVER, Adelaide.

* *ACE centres* —community-managed organisations specialising in the provision of adult education
Adult secondary—courses for adults provided by secondary schools
AMES—adult migrant education services
Community access —community-based centres providing education as one of their services (e.g. neighbourhood houses)
TAFE—personal enrichment programs
Universities —personal enrichment programs
Public ACE providers—managed by public authority

ACE statistics for both vocational and personal enrichment programs are reported under the national collection depending on the scope of each State's data. This is generally the case for community education and private providers. In some States and Territories no statistics are currently collected from community-managed education providers; however, their TAFE data on personal enrichment programs (non-vocational Stream 1000 activity) are accepted as ACE data. Only personal enrichment (Stream 1000) activity is reported as ACE activity for programs undertaken in universities, TAFE and other government providers. For these reasons there is considerable under-reporting of ACE activity. The non-reporting of ACE data outside ANTA's scope and boundaries (non-publicly funded activity) further exacerbates the under-reporting of adult education statistics.

Schofield et al. (1996, p. A6.1) maintain that the data limitations and the lack of comparable national data are due to the extent to which the States and Territories:

- distinguish between ACE providers (that is, community-based providers) and other providers, private or public
- co-ordinate provision by ACE providers in the State or Territory
- fund provision by ACE providers in the State or Territory

- regard ACE as Stream 1000 courses
- collect data on other than TAFE Stream 1000
- distinguish between ACE provision of accredited courses and ACE provision of non-accredited courses in Streams 2000–4000
- include ACE provision of other than Stream 1000 courses within the State Training Profile

This paper will report on the ACE provision of vocational and personal enrichment programs that are included in the national collection. It will also include an estimate of non-reported activity in terms of general trends affecting participation in ACE in Australia. However, the main intent of the paper is to present a discussion on the supply and demand of adult and community education in the broadest sense of the definition; that is, to discuss ACE activity generated through all sources.

Supply of adult and community education

Client profile

Australian adult learners tend to be young, employed and educated (AAACE 1995). These were the findings of a survey undertaken in May 1995 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), commissioned by the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education. McIntyre (1996a) summarises the survey results as follows:

- Twenty-five per cent of Australians are estimated to have taken an adult education course in the preceding year.
- Participation declines sharply with age.
- More than 50 per cent of courses are provided by an employer, union or industry association.
- Participation increases with personal income, except for the highest-income earners.

AAACE (1995) maintains that almost a third of adult Australians under 55 years of age had undertaken a course in 1994. This compares with less than 10 per cent of those aged over 55 years. Hence, adult education participants are predominantly young and are within the employable sector of the population.

Participation in adult learning also correlates positively with previous educational qualifications. Clients with a degree comprised 45 per cent of the participants. A further 33 per cent had a certificate or diploma and 25 per cent a trade certificate, while those with no post-school qualifications comprised 17 per cent of clients (AAACE 1995). Professionals and para-professionals (52 per cent) were more likely to access adult education, with labourers (23 per cent) and the unemployed (12 per cent) being the least likely to participate in an adult education program. The AAACE survey also revealed that the poorest and the wealthiest people in Australia were the least likely to undertake an ACE course.

Clients predominantly undertook courses to upgrade work skills (25 per cent) or to extend their knowledge of a subject (25 per cent). These reasons were also strongly associated with the three most common areas of learning undertaken by adult learners:

- computing and business
- language and communication
- health, fitness and care

Over a million clients were estimated to have undertaken non-credit computing and business courses in 1994, which represented 9 per cent of participants (AAACE 1995).

Professionals undertook mainly courses in language, communication or health, whereas unemployed clients undertook predominantly traditional general adult education programs such as art, craft and humanities.

While men were more likely to undertake programs run by employers, unions or industry bodies (10 per cent contrasted with 20 per cent by women), women (6 per cent) were more likely to undertake programs offered by adult education centres.

In general, women and the unemployed tended to undertake general adult education courses (personal enrichment programs), while men and those with higher educational qualifications tended to undertake more vocational programs.

General adult education and vocational programs

For the purposes of collecting statistics, ACE provision is at present loosely divided into two main areas:

- general adult education (personal enrichment)
- vocational education

If *only* general adult education (personal enrichment) programs are considered, community providers are responsible for most of the provision of adult and community education, although this varies between States. Community providers include community and neighbourhood centres, evening community colleges and the University of the Third Age at the local level. They also include organisations such as the Workers' Educational Associations (WEAs) and the Council of Adult Education at the regional or statewide level (Barnett & Wilson 1994). Other providers of adult and community education include TAFE institutions, higher education (extension services and continuing education) and the schools sector (matriculation, bridging courses etc.).

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 indicate the percentage of clients undertaking vocational and personal enrichment courses in Australia according to the type of provider and the number of hours generated by these clients. It should be noted that in these tables *personal enrichment only* programs are defined within a limited scope (Stream 1000 activity reported as 'ACE' for programs undertaken in universities and TAFE). The *vocational* programs shown in the tables are *not* those offered solely by ACE but include *all* programs offered within ANTA's scope of publicly funded vocational education and training. However, the tables may provide an indication of the provision of personal enrichment programs, limited though it is.

Table 2.4: Clients (%) by provider type, 1995–97

	1995		1996		1997	
	Vocational programs	**Personal enrichment only**	**Vocational programs**	**Personal enrichment only**	**Vocational programs**	**Personal enrichment only**
TAFE & other government providers	90.0	10.0	91.0	9.0	92.1	7.9
Community providers	39.5	60.5	42.5	57.5	47.9	52.1
Other registered providers	–	–	–	–	99.6	0.4
TOTAL	76.6	23.4	77.6	22.4	81.0	19.0

Sources: NCVER 1997, *Australian vocational education & training statistics 1996: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.
NCVER 1998a, *Australian vocational education & training statistics 1997: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 show that, in 1997, 47.9 per cent of clients in the community education sector enrolled in vocational courses, which constituted 63.7 per cent of the total hours (NCVER 1998a). In contrast, 52.1 per cent of clients in the community education sector enrolled in personal enrichment programs, which constituted 36.3 per cent of total hours.

confirming that personal enrichment (general adult education) programs are generally of shorter duration than vocational courses.

The tables provide an indication of proportions of client numbers and hours within vocational and personal enrichment programs only. The Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE 1995) provides an estimate for the broader and more comprehensive provision of adult learning in Australia. AAACE indicates that 57 per cent of employers or industries provide courses. Adult education centres or community bodies and public education institutions each provide 12 per cent of ACE courses. Private providers make up 10 per cent of adult learning provision and government departments comprise the remaining 9 per cent.

Table 2.5: Annual hours (%) by provider type, 1995–97

	1995		1996		1997	
	Vocational programs	Personal enrichment only	Vocational programs	Personal enrichment only	Vocational programs	Personal enrichment only
TAFE & other government providers	98.9	1.1	99.0	1.0	99.2	0.8
Community providers	56.7	43.3	60.3	39.7	63.7	36.3
Other registered providers					99.1	0.9
TOTAL	96.6	3.4	96.9	3.1	97.2	2.8

Sources: NCVER 1997, *Australian vocational education & training statistics 1996: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.
NCVER 1998a, *Australian vocational education & training statistics 1997: In detail*, NCVER, Adelaide.

General adult education programs (Stream 1000)

Schofield et al. (1996) maintain that the Stream 1000 non-accredited general adult education courses within the national VET system comprise between 70 and 100 per cent of ACE provision. Schofield et al. (1996, p. viii) state that 'for the overwhelming majority of ACE providers, general adult education is the core of their work although this does vary significantly among providers'.

The NCVER recently released a publication outlining the extent of Stream 1000 programs in Australia (*Australian personal enrichment education and training programs statistics 1996: An overview* (NCVER 1998b)). The publication denotes this activity as 'personal enrichment', with programs not generally leading to further education or employment. However, the division between personal enrichment and vocational education is blurring. While these programs are defined as 'personal enrichment', clients may well be motivated to undertake further education or employment. For example, a person undertaking a 'leisure' landscaping course may later become employed as a landscaper even though this was not their original intention for undertaking the course. Nevertheless, the findings of the NCVER publication (1998b) reveal the following:

- Of the 426 323 personal enrichment program clients in Australia in 1996, 390 110 undertook personal enrichment programs only and 36 213 undertook both personal enrichment and vocational programs.
- The majority of clients were female (74.4 per cent).
- Clients were predominantly in the 30–39-year age group (20.9 per cent), with 18 per cent in the 40–49-year age group.
- Personal enrichment program clients were located mainly in capital cities (59.2 per cent).
- Rural and remote clients comprised 25.7 per cent of clients.

- Personal enrichment clients were predominantly in programs offered by community providers (71.2 per cent), with the remaining clients in programs offered by TAFE and other government providers.
- The programs by area of learning with the most enrolments were:
  - hospitality, tourism and personal services (39.2 per cent)
  - visual/performing arts (30.0 per cent)
  - humanities (9.9 per cent)

While the balance may be shifting from the provision of only short, non-accredited personal enrichment programs to the provision of VET and personal enrichment programs (tables 2.4 and 2.5), it should be noted that this observation is based on data obtained from the limited national statistical collection of 'ACE' provision. Personal enrichment, leisure and cultural activity outside the scope of public policy is not currently being measured but is without doubt an increasing component of adult and community education as it is defined in the broadest, most inclusive sense.

Vocational programs (Streams 2000–4000)

McIntyre (1993, p. v), reporting on a survey of the vocational scope of ACE, reveals that ACE in New South Wales was meeting a strong demand for business, administration and management courses. McIntyre adds that computing, software packages, keyboarding, clerical, specialised reception skills, typing, book-keeping and shorthand are most often cited as courses that are 'vocational' in presentation.

ACE contributes to vocational education and training by providing accessible, learner centred and inexpensive programs, responsive to the needs of the local community. ACE is also a major provider of bridging programs to further education and training, small business training, and the 'hidden work of domestic economy and community activity' (McIntyre 1993, p. vii).

The survey reveals that as many as 26 per cent of respondents reported a clear vocational reason as their primary motive for participating in ACE (preparing for a new or a current job, household work skills, preparing for other studies). If the item 'becoming a better informed or skilled person' is included within the scope of 'vocational', then 64 per cent (of NSW) respondents can be said to have included a vocational component as their primary motive (McIntyre 1993, p. viii).

Barnett and Wilson (1994) present a case study of four disparate providers of adult and community education in order to examine the vocational orientation of community provision of education and training, the impact of the Training Reform Agenda on community providers and the relationship between community providers and TAFE colleges. The findings reveal that three of the four providers developed a vocational component as part of their overall course provision, while one retained a personal enrichment (Stream 1000) focus. The latter provider indicated that there was not the demand for vocational programs in the local area and that it lacked the human resources to supply such courses.

The study also reveals that 'consumer demand for skill-based programs [with credentials] had been increasing, while demand for recreation-based programs had decreased' (Barnett & Wilson 1994, p. 20).

Barnett and Wilson (1994, p. 24) found that, due to financial constraints, community providers were under increased pressure to change the focus of the provision of training, indicated by the following:

- a change in program provision to include more skills-based and vocationally focussed courses

- pressure to diversify the basis for funding due to limited resources being available from adult community education funding sources
- involvement in competitive tendering to deliver labour market programs
- increasing student numbers and a change in the consumer profile to include business organisations as well as individuals
- pressure to provide accredited courses in delivering vocational education and training
- pressure to obtain recognition and credibility in the community for this role, because of the developing role as a provider of vocational education and training

The pressure for community providers to change was also due in part to economic and social factors, as well as to increased demand by consumers. This resulted in an emphasis on employment-related courses or on pathways to further education and training, predominantly into certified vocational courses.

Schofield et al. (1996) identify the provision of vocational courses (Streams 2000–4000) as a critical opportunity in the ACE sector. To deliver nationally recognised courses, a provider must be registered. The proportion of providers providing ACE programs differs markedly between States and Territories; however, Schofield et al. (1996) report the following information on the registration of ACE providers:

- An estimated 180 ACE providers are registered training providers, constituting approximately 18 per cent of all registered providers (ACE and non-ACE) and 15 per cent of all ACE providers (although probably less).
- VET course activity by ACE providers in 1995 accounted for between 1.5 and 2 per cent of national VET course activity, although not all of this was accredited.
- The majority of non-TAFE providers are community providers, although it is not possible to determine exactly what proportion of the non-TAFE providers nationally can be described as ACE providers as distinct from private providers.
- The proportion of accredited hours of training programs delivered by non-TAFE providers is planned to rise from 27 per cent in 1995 to 41 per cent in 1998.
- ACE providers play a significant role in the delivery of accredited and non-accredited adult literacy, adult basic education and english as a second language programs.
- ACE providers are contracted by industries, enterprises and government VET agencies and providers to deliver accredited adult basic education programs.

ACE providers have become increasingly competitive in winning government contracts for programs targeted at special groups and 'some providers have also gone a step further, drawing on revenues from full-fee paying participants to subsidise less advantaged participants' (Crowley 1997, p. 63). While this approach has been successful, some concerns have been noted.

The Crowley Committee, in the report *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997, p. 12), acknowledges the 'considerable' vocational significance of ACE provision, commenting that 'there is a strong case, even in the narrowly prescribed terms of vocational criteria, to invest public funds in ACE provision'.

Demand for adult and community education

Globally, the growth in adult and community education has reached explosive proportions: the sector is growing at a faster rate than any other educational sector, with predictions of increasing demand for adult education worldwide (Belanger 1996, p. 1).

Australian figures (Bennink & Blackwell 1995; Evans 1995) also show an increase in the participation in adult and community education, from 68 per cent of Australians in 1986 who had taken a course at some stage in their adult life to 78 per cent in 1994. In 1986, 32 per cent of adults had never undertaken an adult education course, contrasted with 22 per cent in 1994 (Evans 1995). Evans adds that many adults are likely to undertake more than one course, with an average of five courses per adult over their adult life. Hence, Evans maintains that adult education in Australia has grown in two ways:

- *extensively*, by providing courses to new participants
- *intensively*, as participants choose to undertake more courses

An increasingly ageing global population will be a major factor in the demand for adult and community education in the future. Young (1990) conservatively projects that the 65- and-over age group will represent 17 per cent of the total population by 2025. An increase in the number of older Australians will therefore influence the amount and type of education and training required to meet the needs of individuals and the community.

The establishment and growth of international and national conferences on adult and community education have influenced official recognition of the adult learning sector in Australia and worldwide. Prestigious organisations such as OECD and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have expanded their research and policy directions to include the adult and community education sector. World leaders have embraced education and lifelong learning as the key to positive transformations in the political, cultural and economic arenas at local, national and international levels.

The international and national focus on adult and community education by policy-makers has centred on an evolving vision of lifelong learning for all people, irrespective of age, social status, culture or background. OECD maintains that the adult education sector is well positioned to make a positive impact towards the elimination of inequalities within the learning environment. The vision is for adult education to be an integral part of lifelong learning, promoting family and community learning as well as dialogue between people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. This vision calls for inclusive learning for all under-represented groups to build on their potential and the resources of all people within a nation's population.

Under-represented groups in Australia are generally seen to be women, people from non English-speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with disabilities. Bennink and Blackwell (1995) identify the following groups as being disadvantaged in employment, education and training:

- people with disabilities
- people from a non-English-speaking background
- people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- the unemployed
- those with low levels of education and income
- those who are geographically or socially isolated
- women (although women are well represented in ACE, they are under-represented in further and higher education and therefore are considered to be disadvantaged)

Apart from the inherent cultural barriers to the participation of under-represented groups in education and training, social and economic factors may also impact on people not overtly perceived to be disadvantaged. Reasons for their under-representation in education may be attributed to a range of factors:

> *The obstacles range from simple physical problems of the time, costs, location, range and accessibility of learning opportunities to the lack of adequate support for carers and problems of transport. Some barriers affect particular groups. For example, the absence of childcare, transport arrangements and even course times which may not fit with*

> *collecting children from school make difficulties for parents with school-age children . . . Often people's attitudes are a major barrier for people with learning difficulties; stairs too often limit choices for people in wheelchairs; and those with learning difficulties are too often confronted by a lack of suitable facilities or properly trained staff.* (NAGCELL 1997)

Such barriers may involve a lack of confidence and self-esteem in individuals who perhaps have had unpleasant experiences of early education. These beliefs may lead to a lack of commitment to education or a feeling that they will fail if they attempt more education. Such beliefs may be compounded by the assumption (or reality) of an unresponsive and rigid learning environment in further education institutions. Hence, some adults may feel that there is little benefit and relevance for education in their lives.

The provision of relevant post-compulsory education, particularly for under-represented groups, is therefore an avenue through which the adult and community education sector can have a significant impact.

The ageing population

The Crowley Committee (Crowley 1997) maintains, in *Beyond Cinderella*, that the most significant change in the profile of Australia's population is the greatly increased proportion of older people.

Young (1990) projected that proportion of people aged 65 years and over would be 12 per cent of the total Australian population by the year 2005. However, the over-65 age group had already reached 12.2 per cent in 1997 (ABS 1997a). Further projections estimate that the older Australian population will be 17.6 per cent in 2021, 20.3 per cent in 2031 and 23.7 per cent in 2051 (ABS 1998) (table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Age groups as percentages of total Australian population, 1988–2051

Age groups (years)	1988	1991	1996	2001	2021	2051
65 or older	10.8	11.2	12.1	12.3	17.6	23.7
15–64	66.8	66.8	66.7	67.4	65.1	60.5
15–24	16.5	16.0	14.6	13.6	12.2	11.2
0–14	22.4	22.0	21.2	20.3	17.3	15.8

Sources: ABS 1992, 1997a, *Australian demographic statistics*, ABS, Canberra.
ABS 1998, *Population projections: 1997 to 2051*, ABS, Canberra.

Since the nineteenth century there has been a major sustained increase in the life expectancy of older people (table 2.7). The growth is expected to continue, with projected life expectancies for the year 2000 being 76.5 years for men and 81.4 years for women (Parliament of Victoria 1997). With females generally living longer than men, it is estimated that the number of aged females (in the over-65-year-old age group) will be greater than that of males (Hugo 1992).

Table 2.7: Life expectancies (years) of Australians, 1870–2000

	1870	1989	2000
Males	46.0	73.3	76.5
Females	50.0	79.6	81.4
Average	48.0	76.5	79.0

Source: Adapted from Parliament of Victoria 1997, *Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing*, Family & Community Development Committee, Melbourne.

The growth of the older sector of the Australian population implies an increased demand for a wide range of social services, including adult education. Hugo (1992) stresses that people in the older age groups at the turn of the twenty-first century will have been denied post-compulsory education in their teens and early twenties. Thus the design of educational

programs to enrich the lives of older people will be a high priority for educators in the twenty-first century.

Brell (1996, p. 108) maintains that, with an increasingly ageing population, 'no longer will higher or post-compulsory education be just for the young or just for work and career'. Citing the 1994 report of the NSW Consultative Committees, *Living Longer, Living Better: Learning Together*, Brell argues that the major learning opportunities for the aged are:

- learning as a form of recreation
- vocational training with employment possibilities
- preparation and maintenance for a more fulfilling lifestyle with learning opportunities for the new skills required for the retirement years

Brell adds that for older people to enjoy productive, satisfying, socially useful lives, they need access to information, knowledge and skills. They also possess the capacity to be both consumers and providers of learning experiences.

Sumich (1997), in a study of ACE participants in New South Wales in 1996, indicates that middle-aged students are more likely than younger participants to undertake courses 'to provide knowledge for life in general'. Older students (aged 55 and over) are more likely to undertake adult education courses for 'a challenge' or to 'make better use of spare time'.

Many organisations currently offer formal non-award courses and subjects for 'life in general' to retired people. These include Probus Clubs, the Australian Retired Persons' Association, neighbourhood houses and community centres. Non-formal, non-award programs are also offered by the Australian College for Seniors and the University of the Third Age.

Employment and the aged

The unemployment of mature-aged (45–55 years) and older (over 55 years) people has emerged as a major issue in Australia (Kernot 1998).

In May 1997 the ABS (1997b) estimated that 791 900 people in Australia were unemployed. Over 150 000 (19.1 per cent) of the unemployed are aged 45 years and over, and 45 000 (5.7 per cent) are over 55. Most mature-aged unemployed are male (62.7 per cent). Most unemployed are also looking for full-time work (84.2 per cent). Older workers are generally perceived to be unable to adapt to changing technologies and work practices. Nevertheless, older workers consider themselves to have greater experience and commitment to work than younger people (Parliament of Victoria 1997).

An international study by Moore, Tilson and Whitting (1994) on employment policies and practices towards older workers highlighted a radical change in attitudes towards the contribution of older workers to the labour market. Where previously the exit of older workers was actively encouraged, the current global view positively favours their retention in the workforce. Many countries are now actively promoting strategies to keep older workers in the workforce (Moore, Tilson & Whitting 1994).

For many older people seeking worthwhile challenges and active participation in the community, volunteerism is a viable option. A large proportion of the administrative staff in the ACE sector comprises volunteers, particularly in rural areas. Older people, particularly retirees, benefit from volunteer work as consumers and as users of volunteer services.

Whether for retirement, retraining, volunteer training or the retention of people in employment, there is unlimited scope for the adult and community education sector to provide training opportunities for 'older' and 'mature-aged' clients.

Young people

While a large part of this paper deals with the issue of an ageing Australian population, it is nevertheless important to point out that the number of young people (15–24 years), while declining, will continue to represent a significant proportion of the population (table 2.6). There will therefore continue to be a demand for training opportunities for this age group:

> *Clearly, continuing structural change in the economy, labour displacement, soaring rents and interest rates on housing loans, increasing costs of further education and burgeoning social pressures are placing greater stress on youth than their parents experienced at the same stage of the life cycle . . . It is clear that support systems and adequate training opportunities are needed for Australia's youth if we are to avoid large numbers of the present youth population forming a permanent underclass.* (Hugo 1992, p. 78)

The Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) of Victoria notes that with the recent changes in federal government policies, such as restrictions to unemployment benefits for young people, and the decline in secondary school retention rates during the 1990s, the numbers of young people looking for alternative education pathways will increase:

> *The type and scope of educational services currently offered do not necessarily meet the needs of those young people who are unable to, or do not wish to, complete the VCE or equivalent courses in a secondary school or TAFE setting. Students who leave school early are at a greater risk of unemployment and often have a history of poor school attendance.* (ACFEB n.d., p. 7)

Sumich (1997), in a study of New South Wales ACE participants, showed that younger participants (18–24 years) were more likely to undertake ACE courses to obtain work-related skills (30 per cent) than for leisure reasons. The study indicates a trend for work skills to become less important as a motivating factor for undertaking an ACE course as the participants aged. Therefore the greatest potential market for the provision of work-related and vocational skills is young people.

ACFEB (n.d., pp. 8–10) proposes more flexible pathways between secondary school, work, adult education and services for youth for a more comprehensive and integrated system.

Women and men

Johnson and Hinton estimated in 1986 (p. 43) that 'women "almost own" Australian adult education by continuing to participate at rates of between 75 and 80 per cent'. The NSW Board of Adult and Community Education reported that 75 per cent of course participants in their State were female (NSW BACE 1995). Other sources also estimate a 75 per cent participation rate for women (Crowley 1997; ACFEB n.d.; NCVER 1998a).

However, it should be noted that this percentage may apply to general adult education (that is, Stream 1000 personal enrichment programs) and *not* vocationally related, workplace education. If workplace training is counted, then the participation rates of women and men may even up (Gribble 1992; AAACE 1995).

Whether the participation rate of women in ACE is closer to 50 per cent or 75 per cent is unclear. What is clear is that, in the past two decades, women have demanded more from adult, community and further education than previously (ACFEB n.d.; Gribble 1992). Women, in particular, are demanding services such as child care, greater access to vocational training and consideration for subsidised education.

Women have embraced the ACE learning culture for both leisure and vocational programs, and evidence indicates that this trend will continue (Crowley 1997). However, there is an increasing need for males to see the benefit of courses provided by ACE, such as health and

wellbeing. The education of men, particularly older men, cannot be ignored for the following important reasons (Ward 1996):

- men score lower than women on the life satisfaction scales
- male mortality rates are higher than those of women
- older men commit suicide more frequently than women

While older men have higher death rates than older women for all major causes, women are more prone to depression and dementia. A study on ageing (Parliament of Victoria 1997) indicates that poverty is one of the major determinants of psychiatric illness and is more likely to have an adverse effect on older women. This is due in part to their longer life expectancy and limited incomes (particularly after the death of their spouse or partner). The above factors indicate a market for ACE in the area of social, health and life skills for older males. This should be offered independently of retraining required because of retrenchment and unemployment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have long been familiar with the concept of lifelong learning, and education is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as it has a strong link with their identity (CAR 1997). Bourke (CAR 1997, p. 93) sums up the importance of this link and her aspirations for education and training for Aboriginal people:

> *Education [is] the most important strategy for achieving realistic self-determination for the Aboriginal people of Australia. We do not see education as a method of producing an anglicised Aborigine but rather as an instrument for creating an informed community with intellectual and technological skills, in harmony with our cultural values and identity. We wish to be Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia.*

The Crowley Committee report (Crowley 1997) maintains that the demand from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults for education and training has grown exponentially, with growth outstripping supply. The report notes that, according to the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, the education system would need to increase student contact hours by over 45 per cent if it were to keep up with the demand for Aboriginal adult education and vocational training. Currently the ACE sector provides primarily adult education for Aboriginal people and views Aboriginal participation as an 'equity and access' issue (Crowley 1997).

Indigenous Australians comprise 2 per cent (372 052) of the Australian population (ABS 1997a). They live, on average, 18.5 years less than non-indigenous Australians. By the year 2000, the average life expectancy of non-indigenous Australians (males and females) will increase by four years, while the life expectancy of indigenous Australians will increase by one year. Due to their shorter life expectancies, indigenous Australians use aged-care services earlier than non-indigenous people. This trend has implications for lifestyle, health and wellbeing education specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

People with disabilities

Statistics on the participation of people with disabilities in adult and community education are limited. Quaas and Fraser (1994, p. 32) maintain that the difficulties in collecting data on people with disabilities in the education sector are due to the group not being 'a static or homogenous population'.

In Australia, approximately 2.5 million (16 per cent) of the population has stated that they have a disability (Quaas & Fraser 1994). The Disability Advisory Council of Australia estimated that by the year 2000 the percentage of people with disabilities will be between 23 and 35 per cent (Aulich 1991; Quaas & Fraser 1994).

In 1996, of those undertaking personal enrichment programs within the ACE sector, at least 8322 clients indicated that they had a disability (NCVER 1998b). This represents 2.0 per cent of the Stream 1000 population, with 73 per cent women and 27 per cent men. However, information on disabilities within the Stream 1000 population is limited, with 78 per cent not indicating whether or not they have a disability. Given that this is an underestimate of the number of clients in adult and community education with disabilities, the true figure will be considerably less than the national disabled population in Australia of 16 per cent.

Quaas and Fraser (1994) reveal that many ACE providers have inadequate provision for people with disabilities, citing financial restrictions as the main reason.

Migrants

Migrants living in Australia come from a multitude of backgrounds covering a diverse range of cultures, religions and languages. Older migrants generally face more difficulties than younger migrants, particularly with language and literacy, isolation, transport and culturally inappropriate services (Parliament of Victoria 1997). The health of older people from non-English-speaking backgrounds is generally better than the health of older people born in Australia; however, they are likely to have limited access and information about health services due to language difficulties.

At the time of the AAACE survey undertaken in May 1995 by the ABS, almost a third of Australian-born clients had undertaken an adult education course, compared with 20 per cent of migrants (AAACE 1995).

Migrants participating in ACE tend to be older than Australian-born clients, more likely to take programs at the lower skill level of the labour force (Crowley 1997). Hence, there is scope within the ACE sector to provide language, literacy and lifestyle programs to migrants, as well as higher level vocational programs.

Rural and remote Australians

Adult education in rural and remote Australia is extremely diverse and highly decentralised. Its pattern of delivery is varied and uneven, with providers ranging from large provincial organisations to almost none in smaller isolated areas (Saleeba 1992).

Because much of the education in rural areas is informal, limited published data on the extent of adult education in these areas is available. The NCVER provides data on Stream 1000 programs in rural and remote areas (NCVER 1997). In 1996, 25.7 per cent of personal enrichment program clients were located in rural and remote areas. This contrasts with 59.2 per cent located in capital cities, and a further 5.6 per cent in other metropolitan areas. Community providers account for 26.8 per cent of remote and rural area provision, while TAFE and other government organisations account for 23.0 per cent. This is indicative of the demand for short, leisure and general adult education programs that are responsive to the communities' immediate needs.

Rural people rely much more on informal training than many of their city counterparts. This informal training includes short programs, field days, industry information days, community events and agricultural shows. It is this form of adult education which is not recognised and reported and which therefore underestimates the amount of training actually occurring in country areas (Nicolls 1997). Hence, the lack of adequate data makes it difficult to estimate the potential need for adult education in regional rural and remote areas. Anecdotal evidence, however, indicates a strong need and a growing demand for adult and community education.

Capabilities of providers to meet demands

A survey of the ways in which providers assess community demand for adult and community education highlights the varied and extensive methods used by the ACE sector (NSW BACE 1996a). The predominant methods include use of the State Training Profiles, networking among providers, logging and analysing course enquiries, response to advertisements, discussions with employer groups and client satisfaction surveys. Other methods include community surveys, ACE-TAFE regional planning, student destination surveys and the use of Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB) strategic plans.

These methods have enabled adult and community providers to develop and maintain a strong reputation for their ability to respond to the immediate educational, social and vocational needs of local communities. McIntyre (1995) estimates that in New South Wales 20 per cent of short community courses have a direct occupational preparation outcome for participants and are therefore important in meeting immediate vocational education and training needs and demands.

The ACE sector has the reputation for customer satisfaction in the provision of programs that are intergenerational and intercultural. Due to significant volunteer involvement, ACE providers have a high profile in most regional communities, from small towns to Aboriginal settlements. They also provide a safe learning environment for under-represented groups and disadvantaged individuals for whom the formal educational structures appear too daunting.

ACE providers are favourably placed to meet the demands for general adult education, community education, short informal courses, credentialled courses, public education and leisure and industry programs. They are also well positioned to meet the needs and demands of potential users, contingent upon continued support from educational authorities and governments.

Demand versus need: A well-educated society is a healthy society

Representatives from organisations such as the OECD have expressed the view that high unemployment is a symptom of the failure of education and training, and emphasise the mismatch between what a nation's economy needs and what the people of that nation demand (OECD 1996a). Currently, the demand for specific programs (such as business, computing and leisure) is not meeting the general needs of society.

Certain needs within the community, therefore, should be addressed. These include social issues, health, welfare, environment and culture. Participation in social, leisure and physical activities is positively related to higher levels of health, self-esteem and life satisfaction (Parliament of Victoria 1997). With an increasingly ageing population and a growing cohort of dependent and disadvantaged groups, governments have a responsibility to fund health and social services that support education and information to the community at large (OECD 1996a; Baldwin 1997; NAGCELL 1997; Crowley 1997; UNESCO 1997).

Current ACE provision in the general community is vast, and includes literacy and language programs, community development and learning opportunities for a wide section of the community. Therefore the adult education sector is the best placed of all the educational sectors to provide public education in order to meet not only the demands of the community but also their needs.

The relevance of general adult education and personal enrichment programs in enhancing self-esteem and work attitudes emerged as a key issue at the OECD's 'Education and Training for the Workforce' seminar. It was argued that, in many cases, social skills were more relevant for people seeking employment than were skills related to vocational training, particularly for retrenched workers.

In addition to providing social and communication skills for the workplace, particularly for the older unemployed, the ACE sector can have an influential role in health education. Again, this is particularly relevant for the ageing population. The Crowley Committee (Crowley 1997) emphasises the importance of ACE provision within the general community. The report also notes that ACE's involvement with older people, among whom the stimulus of learning sustains mental and social activity, may help to stave off dependency, hospitalisation and alienation. Hence 'there are enormous savings to be made in health care and welfare expenditure if support for older people to engage in adult education reduces their need to enter a nursing home' (Crowley 1997, p. 11).

The Victorian study on ageing (Parliament of Victoria 1997) reported that 20 per cent of carers for the aged were themselves over 65 years of age. Forty per cent of carers were employed, although they restructured or reduced their working arrangements to contribute to the care of older people or relatives. As the ageing population increases, there will be a greater demand for carers. There will also be a need for education and training to improve care, to reduce the stress on carers and to advocate the need for carers within the community.

Funding issues

Determining the cost of ACE

The philosophical benefits of education in general, and adult education in particular, are well documented and fundamentally agreed upon by almost every sector of the international and Australian population. However, the need to account for public money and the distribution of resources spent on education has become essential in economies facing increasing financial pressures. For the purposes of public accountability, there has been an increase in monitoring and measuring the outputs of vocational education and training. However, the intrinsic benefits of general adult education programs are difficult to quantify. Adult and community education can therefore appear to consume resources with little evidence of quantifiable outcomes.

The OECD (1996b) maintains that any investment in human capital, particularly in education, generates economic growth. Other benefits of lifelong learning according to the OECD include:

- growth of individual earnings and/or wellbeing
- positive impacts on environmental quality, reducing crime and health
- national and regional economic growth
- improvement in equity goals

The OECD argues that the issue of cost is crucial in expanding educational opportunities for ACE clients. Measuring the cost per student in ACE in order to determine appropriate current and future funding arrangements for the provision of ACE is no easy task, due to factors such as:

- The ACE sector is in itself diverse.
- Changing structures, philosophies and innovative practices limit the usefulness of past and existing costs in predicting future costs.
- Not all education costs can be converted into directly measurable outcomes.
- There is a lag between when costs are paid and when benefits are realised.

The OECD (1996b) admits that evaluating the monetary returns of adult and community education both within formal institutions and informally 'at home and at the workplace' is extremely complex. OECD provides examples of industry-based education contributing to

economic growth. There is, however, no evidence of the value to the economy of ACE which is not industry based or designed to improve productivity or earnings. OECD (1996b, p. 230) argues that this lack of evidence is of great concern as it is 'precisely the kind of learning that could prove so crucial in ensuring that citizens are well-informed and active participants in social and cultural life, even after retirement'.

The OECD provides regular global comparisons of education statistics and indicative student costs across OECD countries. These are limited in their scope due to different funding arrangements in each country. However, OECD (1996b, p. 234) indicates that 'nearly two- thirds of recurrent expenditures are taken by compensation of education staff', mainly due to three factors within the tertiary sector:

- salary costs
- the relatively high ratio of non-teaching to teaching personnel
- the high cost of special-use facilities

OECD therefore advocates the innovative delivery of education and training programs through the use of new technologies and distance learning techniques in order to increase cost-effectiveness. This is explored in more detail later in this paper.

In an effort to stress affordable lifelong learning on a global level, OECD (1996b) recommends further research into cost analysis, particularly with regard to the average and marginal costs of education and training interventions. Public money for education, and more particularly for lifelong learning, requires distribution across all sectors, from primary and secondary education to TAFE, universities and adult education. Funds for ACE therefore depend on the overall fiscal policy of the governing authority and the flexibility to move expenditure between different levels of education, as well as on an identified priority for lifelong learning and adult education.

OECD also believes that governments alone should not take the full responsibility for funding education and training, particularly at the higher education level, where there may be benefits to individuals in the form of higher earnings and increased employability. OECD argues that 'where individuals benefit, society benefits: how much society can afford is a political choice' (OECD 1996b, p. 242).

Current funding arrangements

The ACE sector grew rapidly in its early years because it predominantly offered short, flexible and diverse courses to a range of clients. However, the economics of 'full-cost recovery' for adult education courses soon made it apparent that relatively few colleges would do well financially under these conditions and the larger colleges began to look for alternative sources of funding (McIntyre 1995).

Government grants became available for the VET sector for labour market, literacy and other targeted programs that funded student places at a higher rate than fee-paying short courses. ACE providers then considered becoming registered providers, offering a limited number of accredited courses, in order to access Commonwealth and State funds available under specific criteria. Hence the provision of adult and community education has become blurred, with traditional TAFE institutions offering short fee-paying programs in addition to their main function, and ACE providers offering accredited courses funded by government grants in addition to their main function.

McIntyre (1995) maintains that funding concerns have necessitated the move by ACE providers to become more competitive and to diversify to include the provision of traditional VET–TAFE programs in order to sharpen the client focus and raise the quality of services delivered. Schofield et al. (1996, p. 6) maintain that many providers are surviving financially in the marketplace without accessing competitive government funding.

ACE providers registered by the State recognition authorities may compete for funds allocated for the provision of accredited adult education courses. The Crowley Committee (Crowley 1997, p. 63) noted that 'elements of the ACE sector have become increasingly competitive at winning government contracts for programs targeted at special groups' and 'some providers have also gone a step further, drawing on revenues from full-fee paying participants to subsidise less advantaged participants'.

Table 2.8: Funding arrangements for adult and community education in Australian States and Territories

State/Territory	Funding arrangements
New South Wales	The NSW Board of Adult and Community Education receives funds from the State Government which are distributed to community-based providers. These funds contribute to infrastructure and course delivery costs and include targeted funds for language and literacy. ANTA funds are allocated to registered training organisations for the delivery of accredited VET courses, including accredited literacy and language courses. Funds are allocated for professional development, research, equity and other projects, data collection, a quality strategy, equipment and resources. Providers' revenue includes student fees, other government funds for specific programs and services and fees for service.
Victoria	The Adult, Community and Further Education Board distributes State recurrent and ANTA growth funds (accumulated until 1995) to community-based providers and the Council of Adult Education, and also distributes ANTA literacy funds. Stream 2000 and 3000 programs are funded on a student contact hour basis. Approximately 15 per cent of total funds are used to provide general support for the development of adult education in the community. ACE providers also receive Commonwealth equipment and State works and services funds. Since 1996 ACE providers have competitively tendered for Commonwealth growth funds through the Office of Training and Further Education's (OTFE) Government Funded Training Places Programs. ACE providers also obtain funds through their fee-for-service activities, Commonwealth labour market programs and student fees and charges. TAFE institutes and other non-community-based providers run Stream 1000 courses on a fee-for-service basis.
South Australia	Government funding for ACE comes primarily from the State for community-based providers. With the exception of the WEA, which currently receives a dedicated grant subject to a performance agreement to meet ACE priorities, funding is distributed by means of small grants on the basis of application. ANTA provides some funds for literacy provision in the community. To date, no other ANTA funds have flowed to ACE in South Australia.
Queensland	Funds have recently been made available for the ACE sector in Queensland. The arrangements have two components: funds for general ACE activity and funds for ACE courses in rural and remote areas. The first component commenced on 1 January 1997, while the second component commenced on 1 July 1997. Both components are funded on a submission basis. A review is currently being undertaken which may lead to changes in the focus of these programs.
Western Australia	The TAFE college system is one of the many providers of adult community education in Western Australia. In the TAFE sector only Stream 1000 courses constitute part of the Adult Community Education Program. Currently, the maximum fee is $5 per hour, or $2.50 per hour for concessional enrolments. Annual funding is provided to the peak body, Learning Centre Link, and additional project money is available for ACE-related projects. The VET sector also funds a range of accredited and non-accredited adult literacy initiatives. Neither these nor accredited access and bridging courses (Stream 2000) are generally considered part of ACE provision.
Tasmania	TAFE Tasmania is the major provider of adult education programs and adult literacy and basic education programs. This provision is purchased from TAFE Tasmania by the Office of Vocational Education and Training. Access and bridging courses (Stream 2000) are not considered part of ACE. TAFE Tasmania also obtains funds through fees charged for adult education programs. State recurrent funding for ACE provision by non-government community organisations is also administered by the Office of Vocational Education and Training. This funding is allocated on a submission basis. The ACE Advisory Committee to the State Training Authority assists in the assessment of applications.
Northern Territory	Sponsorship of the ACE sector has just been given to the NT Employment and Training Authority. This will provide a little support to enhance planning and linkages but no direct funding for the delivery of non-accredited courses.
Australian Capital Territory	While ACE has no line item in the ACT budget, ACE providers have had regular access to ANTA growth funds through the ACT's Training Market Development Program, which makes such funds available for accredited VET courses through a competitive tendering process. Such delivery has been reported as 'private VET provision' in the ACT Training Profile. In addition, the ACT Office of Training and Adult Education now makes available from its own resources grants to smaller, community ACE providers through an annual submission-based allocation process.

Source: Adapted from Crowley, R (Chair) 1997, *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society*, Report of the Senate Employment, Education and Training Reference Committee, Senate Publications Unit, Canberra.

Note: All States and Territories have provided an update of their funding arrangements for this paper.

Nevertheless, Schofield et al. (1996) indicate that much adult and community education is still currently funded from private sources: for example, from individuals and fee-for-service activity which for some providers could be as much as 50 per cent of their annual expenditure. Funding arrangements, particularly from State and Commonwealth (public) funds, are described in table 2.8.

Collaborations and strategic partnerships between providers of adult education are generally supported in order to maximise limited resources and to improve user choice, flexibility and student outcomes. Other initiatives to optimise government funds include proposals for a user-choice system of education provision. The next sections of this paper explore proposals for a voucher system, a learning entitlement system and other innovative funding initiatives.

The voucher system

The voucher system has been debated in the United Kingdom since 1963 as a way of introducing choice and competition into education (Seldon 1986), although by 1984 the concept was no longer part of the education agenda. It was first discussed in relation to state schools, whereby the 'choice' was to be made by parents, instead of politicians, authorities and teachers.

There were four main reasons for the introduction of educational vouchers (Seldon 1986):

- to increase choice of training provider
- to increase client choice
- for accountability of public funds
- to raise educational standards

The extent to which a voucher scheme would, in practice, extend choice may be limited because choice depends on supply and demand. In the United Kingdom, it was believed that, if providers and consumers of education and training were allowed a relatively free market, there would be a huge expansion in both supply and demand.

Critics maintain that a voucher system is unlikely to cope with any gross imbalance between market supply and market demand. Also, the ebb and flow of students could create management and organisational problems, particularly in the short term. While many critics feel that there would need to be too many adjustments in converting to new funding arrangements, Seldon (1986, p. 29) maintains that this concern is unfounded:

> *The problems of speed of adjustment to new conditions of demand were over-dramatised. Once the new incentives introduced by the voucher to adapt supply to varying demand began to demonstrate their effects, confidence in the systems by administrators and politicians would grow.*

Vouchers were proposed in order to improve standards, as they would be 'market-ensured' standards which have their basis in choice and accountability. However, critics believe that the voucher system would be socially divisive, accentuating the difference between the standards of education available to relatively 'well-off, articulate and enterprising' clients, and those available to the 'poor, educationally apathetic and ill-informed' (Seldon 1986, p. 82).

There is also concern that the number of places in institutions would be limited, and thus merit or other selection criteria would ration access. Lundberg (1992) argues that some opponents of vouchers see social fragmentation as the cost of the increased student choice afforded by a voucher scheme.

A user-choice voucher system would mean that students might be required to outlay expenditure where the program of study costs more than the public funding equivalent. It would also appear that voucher holders could use their subsidy only once a year.

While the fundamental attraction of vouchers is the concept of user choice with freedom of choice and empowerment, Lundberg (1992) maintains that there are too many other factors impinging upon the viability of a voucher system:

> *Despite the attractions of individual empowerment and freedom of choice, these principles need to be weighed with questions of educational quality, industry needs, equity of access, limits on choice, access to information necessary for informed choice, practical factors affecting the effective purchasing power of vouchers, and the risks of fraud. The scope of coverage of voucher provision, the value of the voucher in relation to total costs, and practical administrative details also need to be considered.* (Lundberg 1992, p. 1)

A summary of the advantages and disadvantages of a voucher system is given in table 2.9.

Table 2.9: The advantages and disadvantages of a voucher system

Advantages	Disadvantages
• maximises individual choice	• complex
• democratic	• open to abuse and fraud
• may lead to customised packages of education for consumers	• consumers may have limited information by which to make choices
• encourages diversity	• limits to choices and access
• encourages efficiency	• may lead to inappropriate fee setting of courses
• encourages responsiveness to consumer demands	• may lead to social fragmentation
• competition between providers leads to quality of education	• may oversupply the labour market at inopportune times
• parity of choice between training providers	• demand will not meet labour market needs
• would adjust supply to demand	• clients from disadvantaged groups may use all or most of their vouchers for 'catch-up' and 'remedial' programs
• raises standards of education and training	• too many adjustments to be made
• reduces costs	• students would buy poorer quality, cheaper education
• adjustments become acceptable	• inelasticity of supply
• more voluntary movement between sectors (TAFE, private providers, community organisations etc.)	• more voluntary movement between providers (i.e. switching mid-course or mid-program)
	• too many unresolved questions

Learning accounts/entitlements

UNESCO (1997) is committed to improving the financing of adult education through a number of initiatives. One initiative includes studying the UK proposal for learning entitlements (or accounts) for lifelong learning.

The basic idea behind learning entitlements is user choice, whereby, instead of providing the suppliers of education and training with a subsidy, the government allocates individual entitlements to students. In the United Kingdom, the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL) expects that this learning account model will be introduced from April 1999, with full implementation by the year 2000.

In June 1998, the UK government announced details of 12 pilot projects to test different ways of introducing their plans for individual learning accounts. To date, the UK government has identified a number of key principles that will be tested before full implementation. These include the following (NAGCELL 1997):

- ❖ working with employers, unions and other key stakeholders
- ❖ developing arrangements with providers to create additional incentives for learners

- developing methods for a universal approach (to offer accounts to those who want to learn and can invest a minimum amount of their own money) and a targeted approach (designated government money to target specific skills and under-represented groups)
- designing information, advice and guidance to facilitate decisions by account-holders

Individual learning accounts will be available to everybody, including the self-employed. Some of these accounts will be targeted to addressing specific groups of people such as those without qualifications and in low-skill jobs, those who wish to develop skills in short supply, employees in small firms and those seeking to return to work. Learning accounts are expected to be part of a coherent approach to welfare reform in the United Kingdom as a means of reducing existing inequities between different learners.

The learning account scheme is built on two key principles:

- that individuals are best placed to choose what and how they want to learn
- that responsibility for investing in learning is shared

NAGCELL has welcomed the proposed establishment of individual learning accounts which are contributed to by the government, employers and individuals. However, NAGCELL (1997) maintains that they should not be used to shift responsibility for learning entirely to the individual:

> *The existence of Individual Learning Accounts should not lead to a situation where those who already benefit most from learning and who can afford to contribute to an account, become the main beneficiaries from a new approach to workplace learning.*

Because all gain from the investment, individuals, employers and the government would all contribute, directly or through earnings, to the cost of learning over a lifetime. Employers would continue to have responsibility for the career-related training of their employees, and public funding would be used to widen participation and increase attainment at all levels for the benefit of society. NAGCELL (1997) maintains that co-operation between learning providers, employers and employees, and between the government and the private sector, would be the key to creative and effective use of funds from all sources.

Baldwin (1997) sees the learning account concept as a highly flexible means of financially assisting Australians as they seek a variety of education and training experiences over their lifetime. On completion of secondary schooling, each individual would receive an entitlement, or an 'account', in either monetary terms or in terms of full-time equivalent years of study, or a combination of the two. Accounts could be used to purchase education and training in the university or vocational education sector, or a combination of the two. They could be accessed immediately the individual leaves school or at any later date. The accounts would be periodically replenished and students could also choose to 'top up' their accounts with their own savings.

Learning accounts might also achieve a better demand-side response to meeting education and training needs, given the rapid pace of change and the unpredictability of the labour market. Learning accounts would provide a means for governments to favour education spending that produced unusually large 'external' benefits or which was directed towards national priorities.

Whereas the market mechanism envisaged by the proponents of vouchers ignores the important differences in the social benefits of various courses, the learning entitlements system allows for greater access and equity. Hence, the major advantage of entitlements is their comprehensiveness. Not only does the system address the funding arrangements for secondary and tertiary (university and TAFE) education, but it also addresses adult and community education provision and the supply and demand side of learning. Clark (1996) acknowledges that the impact on the learning culture would be impressive, with individuals making decisions about investing in their own future.

A summary of the advantages and disadvantages of a learning entitlement scheme is given in table 2.10.

Table 2.10: The advantages and disadvantages of a learning accounts/ entitlements system

Advantages	Disadvantages
• degree of flexibility and choice	• people may not exercise choice wisely
• reduces existing inequalities for disadvantaged groups	• people will rush to the more prestigious courses and institutions
• lifetime entitlement to education and training, which promotes lifelong learning	• may shift responsibility totally to students, which may create further inequalities
• can be used in all education and training sectors—hence it is comprehensive	
• customised combinations of education & training	
• can be used immediately or deferred	
• entitlements may be periodically replenished	
• allows for a mix of funding arrangements	

The franchise model

A variant of the learning entitlements model is the franchise model, which is designed to promote non-formal adult learning in lieu of prolonged initial education (OECD 1996b). This model would allow for learning during employment as well as providing learning incentives for under-represented groups, particularly those reticent about undertaking formal vocational programs. It would also encourage retrenched and retired people to continue gaining valuable social and life skills.

The franchise model was proposed and presented at a seminar on vouchers in Amsterdam in 1994 and cited by OECD (1996b) in *Lifelong learning for all*. The details are not widely known, nor has the proposal been publicly debated. However, it appears that entitlements are provided to individuals with existing qualifications. It is unclear whether the required initial qualifications would be secondary or post-compulsory qualifications. Nevertheless, the subsidy would be made up of different equal-sized layers in which the percentage of the subsidy decreased with each layer. For example, the first layer might cover all costs, the second layer might cover 90 per cent of costs, then 75 per cent, 50 per cent and finally 25 per cent for subsequent layers. Hence, in the last case, for example, where the subsidy is 25 per cent of education costs, the individual student would top up the remaining 75 per cent of the costs with private funds. The subsidy would also decrease with the increasing number of qualifications gained by the student.

An advantage of this model for the government is that it can be implemented gradually by starting with partial subsidy or individual entitlements for non-formal education.

Supply and demand

The government monopoly in education and training is declining worldwide due to developments in the supply and demand-driven markets. Supply-side developments include the expansion of non-government providers, such as community organisations and private providers. Other supply-side developments include the introduction of new technologies, such as the Internet. The Internet is used in the provision of distance education, which provides access to more students. Thus, the increased number of education and training suppliers (providers) creates a diverse range of services and programs, including equity, literacy and numeracy intervention, to support disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Demand-side developments have emerged due to greater knowledge of educational choices and more consumer interest in educational standards and choice, referred to by Seldon

(1986) as the 'intellectual revolution'. This is particularly the case in the adult education sector.

User choice is a demand-side initiative intended to increase the responsiveness of the education system to the needs of clients; that is, the supply (Selby Smith & Selby Smith 1997). However, consumers are often seen as the weaker element in the political market as they have not generally had an input into the educational, social and political debate: 'although a market with choice . . . would benefit them, they cannot obtain it easily through the political process' (Seldon 1986, p. 81). Training providers, educational stakeholders and authorities are more organised, concentrated and vocal in political markets (although weaker in the economic market as they are not consumers), yet they are the key policy-makers. Adult education, however, provides the consumer with greater involvement and public voice in their own education and training. The ACE sector would, therefore, be favourably disposed to a more extensive user-choice system.

For the ACE sector, a supply and demand system is required that provides career guidance and encourages people to make optimal use of the entire education and training system to select the most cost-effective mix of methods of study consistent with positive and relevant outcomes. The aim should not be to dictate that the least costly study method be used in all cases, but to encourage students to 'select the most cost-effective combination of study modes that enable their education and training needs to be met' (Baldwin 1997). The focus should, therefore, be on cost-effective outcomes for the benefit of individuals, communities and nations, where both monetary and non-monetary benefits are taken into account.

NAGCELL (1997) maintains that consideration has to be given to the various and proportional responsibilities of government, employers and individuals for the benefit of current learners. Under the learning entitlements model, NAGCELL (1997, p. 8) predicts a positive future for shared responsibility in education and training:

> *Funding bodies, providers and other public agencies will deploy their resources to achieve the best chance of widening participation and promoting high quality provision and achievement. Employers will support their staff by continuous investment in their learning, both for work-related skills and for wider learning activities. Trade unions will be both providers of learning in their own right and also bargain for its provision with employers, on behalf of their members . . . Voluntary and community organisations will give even greater importance to learning than now, gaining access to funds and other resources, including on a shared basis.*

For lifelong learning to be successful, funding arrangements require a redirection across educational sectors. Foundation education, tertiary education and adult learning, therefore, cannot be considered as entirely separate entities, but they could rely on 'mixed' models of finance that combined their advantages (OECD 1996b). OECD proposes a financial arrangement that is best suited to supporting lifelong learning. This includes a combination of individual learning entitlements and substantial income-contingent loans for the university sector.

The model may involve a combination of demand-side and supply-side measures. On the demand side, a flexible funding mechanism is required which will enable people to gain access to customised combinations of study over their lifetime. On the supply side, government interventions are required to ensure the availability of a wide range of openly accessible, low-cost courses in formats that allow people to treat the entire education and training system as a resource. People should be able to make informed choices from the diverse selection of education and training options, with the assistance of career guidance and information.

Discussion of issues

New technologies

NAGCELL (1997) maintains that learning outside conventional educational establishments, particularly learning at home, will become more widespread as a result of the emergence of new technologies. New technologies are changing the way information is stored, presented and transmitted to students, thereby enabling them to be in contact with the best resources and educators. The new technologies have made it possible for students to access programs and courses remotely (by distance), anywhere in the world.

The development of new technologies in computing, communications and broadcasting, and subsequent continuing reductions in cost, will enable access to a wide range of high-quality learning resources and widen participation by overcoming the barriers of geography, place and distance.

Distance delivery techniques include a diverse and flexible selection of resources such as print-based information, videos, cassettes, computers, television and video-conferencing. However, it is computer-based instruction, particularly through the use of programs delivered through the Internet, that is becoming a rapidly viable approach to improving the cost-effectiveness of education delivery (OECD 1996b). Making the best use of existing and potential technologies should therefore open up access and expand student choice.

The implementation of distance delivery has implications for institutions, educators, curriculum designers and individual learners. It has implications for both the development of relevant skills required by students and for the way in which these skills are delivered. OECD (1996b) advocates the use of new technologies to widen the participation of all in lifelong learning. Distance education and distance learning techniques not only provide relevant and applicable skills, but they also tend to be cost-effective, especially for governments.

NAGCELL (1997) suggests that, in advancing learning opportunities through new media, it would be unacceptable for the new technologies to create a broader basis for social inequality in gaining access to learning than already exists. This may be of particular concern for the aged population since some aspects of technology can create tension for older people during transition to new technologies. The ACE sector is well placed to provide critical education and training in the familiarisation and use of new technologies for all consumers, particularly the aged.

Further research

The evidence indicates that the adult and community education sector has grown substantially in the past 40 years. It may be said that, due to its rapid growth, many important areas of research and development in this sector have been neglected or overlooked.

The Aulich report, *Come in Cinderella*, undertaken by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (Aulich 1991), states that research into adult and community education has been 'sadly neglected', due mainly to the lack of nationally comparable statistics. Although the statistics collections are improving, the quality and availability of statistics are still greatly affected by definitional, policy and functional ambiguities. To date, there is yet to be a definable and measurable system of monitoring and reporting on the participation of clients in the adult and community education sector. The committee also notes that the limited existing research lacks resources and funding, a field-based focus, an academic focus, co-ordination at a national level, implementation and a global perspective.

The literature on adult and community education supports a call for a non-limiting view of ACE, particularly in terms of vocational intent, to the exclusion of the social and ecological nature of ACE provision (McIntyre 1996a). McIntyre advocates research that shows 'how the outcomes of participation are achieved in a specific context', and which therefore highlights the distinctive social and economic patterns of a local area, which would subsequently help to determine educational needs (1996a, p. 70). He adds that 'ecological studies of providers and their "response" to the community context can bring out this important dimension of participation in ACE' (McIntyre 1996a, p. 70). McIntyre also urges research into:

- diversity and choice
- their impact on regional and rural areas in Australia
- the contribution of adult community education colleges to the education of regional Australians

OECD (1996b) advocates research into the monetary and non-monetary benefits of adult education. Research in this area is crucial, particularly in regard to the ageing global population, in order to determine the economic and social benefits of education in the provision of well-informed, healthy and culturally and environmentally aware citizens. OECD recommends further research into cost analysis and the distribution of funds to support lifelong learning across all educational sectors. Public money for education, and more particularly lifelong learning, requires distribution across all sectors, from primary and secondary education to TAFE, universities and adult education. Funds for ACE therefore depend on the overall fiscal policy of the governing authority and the flexibility to move expenditure between different levels of education, as well as on its priority for lifelong learning and adult education.

UNESCO (1997) also advocates more research on cost-benefit relationships in adult education as an urgent need, particularly in order to guide and encourage a shift from supply-driven education to demand-driven systems of learning.

There are limited documented studies of the links and inter-relationships between supply and demand. In determining whether or not to pursue education as an adult, a person may weigh up the economic and social costs and benefits. Hence, it is the potential rewards or outcomes of undertaking adult education, such as gains in wellbeing and increased income from leisure or vocational pursuits, that require evaluation. The evaluation of the outcomes of accredited vocational education and training has received some attention in recent years. It is important to assess the outcomes of adult and community education from an individual, a community and a government funding perspective, particularly in relation to the benefits of non-accredited, non-publicly funded activity. Such an assessment can be undertaken in terms of the evaluation of comparatively small amounts of frequent education, as opposed to long (predominantly higher education and TAFE) courses. Another offshoot of this kind of research is the systematic study of how individual outcomes may aggregate into collective outcomes, particularly in health and environmental education. However, research in this area would also be relevant to industry and employee training.

From consultations with stakeholders during the research for this paper, it appeared that local demography, local resources and local industries influenced the demand for adult and community education. However, these factors also appeared to affect the supply of adult and community education. Hence, investigating the correlations between local influence and the demand and supply of adult and community education could prove valuable.

Market research may prove necessary to inform the more efficient interlinking of supply and demand, thereby to reduce the mismatch resulting from discrepancies between supply and demand. Such research would ideally include a study of market segmentation. Although existing market research may continue to attracting and recruiting existing clients, an additional marketing method may be to target union and voluntary organisations with a greater membership of lower socio-economic and disadvantaged membership.

In conclusion, the research on class inequalities and cultural differences in participation contains promising perspectives for the examination of relationships between supply and demand in adult and community education in Australia.

3 Lifelong learning and ACE

Executive summary

The purpose of this discussion paper is to explore the concept of lifelong learning, and to consider its importance within the social and economic context of the twenty-first century. The paper will also to identify the role of adult community education in promoting lifelong learning and in transforming Australia into a learning society.

The growing national and international recognition of the importance of lifelong learning for the workplace, for the individual and for society is reflected in the considerable volume of literature produced over the past three years.

The outcome of research undertaken for this paper highlights the need for greater collaboration between the education sectors and for developing linkages and partnerships. Collaborative effort will also help to blur the distinction between vocational and non-vocational education.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning occurs throughout a person's life at intervals appropriate to their needs. It is life-long in that it recognises the importance of providing individuals with the knowledge, values and personal attributes to equip them for each of the four life stages—childhood, the transition years, working life and the retirement years.

As a concept, lifelong learning is underpinned by a number of principles which are based on the beliefs that everyone is entitled to learn, that all people are capable of learning throughout their lives, and that the learner should be at the centre of the education process.

Lifelong learning equips the *individual* to operate effectively within the ever-changing context of the workplace and society. It also provides *employers* with a knowledgeable and skilled workforce in which workers are both committed and able to update their knowledge and skills as these become obsolete.

Lifelong learning provides *communities* and *government* with a rich pool of skilled and knowledgeable people able to contribute to a healthy and cohesive community life, to build a strong and sustainable economy and to a participative democracy and a cohesive society.

Lifelong learning and ACE

The adoption of lifelong learning has implications for each of the four sectors of education. ACE, perhaps more than any other sector, shares the values and principles embodied in the concept of lifelong learning: it has the same commitment to being learner centred in methodology, to providing access for all and to developing fully rounded individuals equipped to operate effectively in the workforce, the family and society.

Lifelong learning is conditional upon three factors: the individual must have a desire or will to learn, they must possess the capacity to learn, and they must have access to relevant educational programs, appropriate learning facilities and suitable learning support.

Information technology and lifelong learning

The advent of increasingly accessible, interactive, global information networks promises a higher degree of responsiveness and level of learner centredness. Used appropriately as a delivery tool, IT offers learners real choices about what they learn, where they learn, when they learn and the pace at which they learn. IT has the potential to make a significant contribution to advancing lifelong learning and thus to shaping Australia into a learning society.

Governments and lifelong learning

In supporting the principal recommendation of the report *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997), the Commonwealth Government gives an unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and to the promotion of a learning society. At the same time it sends a powerful message to all education sectors, as well as to industry bodies, that lifelong learning is a national priority and that all are expected to contribute to its realisation.

For lifelong learning to become a reality for all Australians, the Commonwealth Government will need to take the lead by developing a shared vision which includes goals, strategic objectives and measurable performance indicators. To ensure progress is made, the government will need to set targets that are framed in quantitative and qualitative terms and possess clear time lines. The government should also establish a mechanism to co-ordinate the national effort, to encourage the development of partnerships between all the education sectors and industry and to stimulate a demand for learning.

The use of funding as a lever for change is one of the most powerful tools available to government. The paper recommends that the government consider establishing a national equity fund which will enable providers to target groups currently under-represented.

The creation of a learning society will require governments to support comprehensive strategies within an agreed national framework. This will avoid duplication of effort and link sectors more clearly. Foremost among recommended strategies is the establishment of a national body within an agreed framework to co-ordinate and foster lifelong learning to facilitate the transition to a learning society.

ACE sector and lifelong learning

As the peak policy advisory body, the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce, is well positioned to make a pivotal contribution to advancing the cause of lifelong learning. It can do this by guiding the various providers into a cohesive sector, and by involving that sector in the development of a national vision, goals and strategic objectives which will lead to Australia's developing a learning culture.

ACE providers can contribute to the realisation of the vision by modelling the lifelong learning ethos. They can further contribute by investing in IT, by engendering a desire for learning and by promoting the benefits of lifelong learning to the individual, the community and the employer.

Further research

In its final section the paper reports on a number of areas identified by stakeholders as worthy of further research. These are the professional development of ACE workers, the use of information and communication technology in ACE, and linkages and partnerships between ACE and other education sectors.

Introduction

One of the first references to lifelong education is found in a report to the British Government Ministry of Reconstruction in 1919. The report recommended that, 'education should be lifelong as a matter of national importance' (Cropley 1979, p. 22). In 1930, some eleven years later, Alfred Whitehead again raised the issue of lifelong learning. In an address at Harvard University he argued that, as knowledge and skills were becoming obsolete at an increasing rate, the 'once-off' preparation for life was no longer adequate and that individuals would need to learn throughout their lives in order to '. . . avoid the catastrophe of human obsolescence' (Whitehead 1931, pp. 8–19).

In 1972, in his book *The adult learner: A neglected species*, Malcolm Knowles lamented that, in spite of the two generations that had passed since Whitehead's insights, schools around the world remained tied to the transmission of subject matter, rather than facilitating the acquisition of skills and attributes required to successfully cope with the complexities of life. Nineteen seventy-two also saw the publication of the landmark report *Learning to be*, commonly referred to as the Faure report (Faure 1972). This was one of the first reports to propose the notion of a learning society. It challenged the traditional role of education as being too restrictive in limiting itself to training the leaders of tomorrow and in preparing the young for an anticipated mode of existence. The report stressed the importance of education being for the whole of life and being available for all.

Notwithstanding these reports, evidence based on participation rates shows that lifelong learning has not been universally embraced and that the changes to our education system and practices that many educators had hoped for have not occurred. In the AAACE publication *Who are Australia's adult learners?* John McIntyre (1996b, p. 2) draws on ABS data to show that only 'one in four Australians aged 18 or over are likely to have taken a course over the past year'.

A paradigm shift

In his address to the 1998 Melbourne UNESCO conference, Victor Ordenez (1998) observed that walking into a bank today is a vastly different experience from that of 20 years ago. He went on to observe that the same cannot be said of walking into a school or institute, where little has changed—in terms of the teacher–student relationship or the methodologies used, or even in terms of the curriculum. However, according to Ordenez, all that is about to change. Ordenez (1998) argues that in an open education market the demand for more relevant content and more flexible and appropriate delivery systems will force education institutions to make fundamental changes to the way they operate. He further argues that lifelong learning will provide the conceptual framework to guide the changes while information technology will be the pivotal tool for their implementation. The result will be a paradigm shift in education of the same magnitude as that experienced by other institutions such as the banks.

Relevance in today's world

There is no doubt that the arguments in support of lifelong learning put forward by Whitehead (1931) in the first half of the century carry even more weight in today's context. For example in the 1950s the world's body of knowledge was said to double about every seven years, but by the year 2000 we are told it will double about every seven months. Similarly, the rate of change in technology in the workplace and in society has also increased exponentially. This rapid rate of change has rendered the traditional concept of a completed education obsolete and it has made learning throughout life an imperative.

What is lifelong learning?

For the purpose of this paper, the term 'lifelong learning' will be used to refer to the learning that occurs throughout every person's life at intervals appropriate to their needs. It includes:

- *formal education*, as in primary, secondary and tertiary
- *non-formal education*, as in much of what happens in the workplace and in ACE
- *informal education*, as in that which is acquired incidentally as a byproduct of life's experiences

An economic and social imperative

To better understand why the concept of lifelong learning has become so topical, and why its implementation has become an economic and social imperative, it is useful to examine in detail a number of the words and phrases contained in the definition.

Lifelong: In using the word 'lifelong', the definition recognises the importance of learning for each of the different phases in a person's life. In his paper *The Lighthouse* Peter Baldwin (1997) divides the human life span into four phases—initial preparation, the transition years, the working life and the retirement years. He reminds us how critical the early years of schooling are and warns that failure to provide the necessary educational building blocks and to develop a positive attitude will create significant blockages to learning in later life.

Learning: The definition deliberately uses the word 'learning' in preference to 'education'. It does so in order to emphasise that lifelong learning is more concerned with outcomes than with inputs. That is to say access to education as such is of little consequence unless that education results in learning.

Every person: Given the complexity and sophistication of today's world it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to defend the belief that completion of compulsory education and one or two years of tertiary education is sufficient for the majority of Australians. The economic and social cost to the nation of citizens not staying abreast with the rapid social, technological and cultural change will be unacceptably high. As for the individuals themselves, failure to engage in learning throughout their lives is likely to mean a less rich and meaningful existence.

At intervals: The words 'at intervals' make the point that lifelong learning does not have to be continuous and does allow for periods during which the learner may not participate in formal or even non-formal education. Informal learning occurs incidentally.

Appropriate to their needs: These words reinforce the importance of education being learner centred. That is to say learning is recognised as being most effective when the learner is able to participate in deciding on the content and the methodology and the place and time at which the learning occurs.

Vocational/non-vocational: The definition does not distinguish between vocational, non-vocational and academic education. This is because in a lifelong learning context people will draw on the full range of education provision, often at the same time. Moreover, the boundaries between vocational and non-vocational education are becoming increasingly blurred. According to Jacques Delors (1998a, p. 21), lifelong learning is as much about equipping people to cope with the ongoing changes in society as it is about skilling them for the workplace.

Philosophical underpinnings

The concept of lifelong learning is underpinned by a comprehensive set of principles which hold that:

- People are capable of learning throughout their lives.
- High-quality educational opportunities must be available to all, irrespective of people's socio-economic condition.
- Lifelong learning is important to the social and economic wellbeing of the nation as well as to the personal fulfilment of the individual.
- Lifelong learning is an essential ingredient in the development of informed citizens who are capable of active participation in a democratic society.
- Lifelong learning is based on the belief that the learner should be at the centre of the educational process.

The above principles appear in various forms in the literature and are enshrined in the ACE policies of several States. For example, the New South Wales government policy on ACE, *Lifelong learning for all*, lists a comprehensive set of guiding principles (NSW BACE 1996b, p. 7).

The benefits

For the *individual*, lifelong learning means gaining and constantly updating the skills, knowledge and attributes required to operate effectively within the dynamic context of the workplace and society. It assumes ongoing growth and development aimed at achieving a healthy and fulfilling life.

For the *employer*, lifelong learning provides the key to a skilled, knowledgeable workforce capable of solving problems, communicating with stakeholders, working with minimal supervision and working in teams. Above all, it relates to workers who have the ability and the commitment to upgrading their knowledge and skills as these become obsolete.

For *communities*, lifelong learning means having access to a richer, more knowledgeable and skilled pool of resources, capable of contributing to a healthy and cohesive community life. It will ensure more-independent, self-managed communities which know what it is they want to achieve and how to make it happen.

For *governments*, lifelong learning is an imperative if their country is to have a strong sustainable economy, vibrant and globally competitive industries, participative democracies and diverse but cohesive societies.

The contribution that each of these stakeholders can make to the achievement of a learning culture will be considered later in the paper.

Towards a learning society

> *Adult learning has grown in depth and scale, and has become an imperative at the workplace, in the home and in the community, as men and women struggle to create new realities at every stage of life. Adult Education plays an essential and distinct role in equipping women and men to respond productively to the continually changing world and to provide learning which acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of the adult and the community.* (UNESCO 1997)

Turn-of-the-century phenomenon

As Australia approaches the twenty-first century there is widespread acceptance that we must get our 'educational house' in order. This is essential if we are to enter the new century with confidence and with a chance of fulfilling the ideal of a peaceful, democratic world which is equitable and which has an environmentally sustainable economy.

The proliferation of reports, inquiries and conferences over the past three years is in part an acknowledgement by governments that the current education system and practices will need to adapt to meet the diverse needs of students in a complex and ever-changing environment. Various commentators draw a correlation between the shortcomings of the current system and the high levels of unemployment and social tension.

Reports and conferences

Although the reports on lifelong education originate from many different countries and have been initiated by governments of differing political persuasions, they are remarkably consistent in their views on:

- the unacceptably low levels of participation in education, shown by OECD data to be the case in its member countries
- the causes of the low participation rates
- the barriers and obstacles that stand in the way of participation
- the consequences of failing to address the educational shortcomings
- the need to address inappropriate teaching practices
- the need to change attitudes to education at government, community and individual levels
- the need for a commitment by government to implement systemic change
- the danger of developing a divided society in which one group possesses the capacity, motivation and technology to acquire knowledge and adapt to change, and one group does not—the information rich and the information poor

National, international and global support

Above all, the reports are unanimous in their advocacy of lifelong learning and in calling for the creation of a learning society. In April 1997 the Senate Committee report *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society* proposed as its key recommendation:

> *The Commonwealth Government makes an unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and the promotion of a learning society; and imbues its education policies and associated funding mechanisms with the values and principles of lifelong learning for all Australians.* (Crowley 1997, p. 7)

A year later, in April 1998, the West report, *Learning for life*, had as its first recommendation:

> *The government declares its commitment to the establishment of a learning society in which all Australians, of whatever social, cultural and economic background, have access to a post secondary education of excellent value.* (West 1998, p. 35)

At the international level two important reports have emerged from the United Kingdom. The first, the product of an advisory group chaired by RH Fryer, identifies 'The need for a cultural revolution in this country to bring the vision of a learning society into reality' (Fryer 1997, p. 1). The second, which is the product of a National Committee of Inquiry chaired by R Dearing (1997), puts the case for implementing a learning society as follows:

. . . to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well prepared for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment

. . . to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application for the benefit of the economy and society

. . . to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local regional and national levels

. . . to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, and inclusive society.

The above indicates a broader view of lifelong learning, one which incorporates the principles of economic and social development as well as the development of the individual.

What is a learning society?

While the authors of the reports cited above have not provided a neat definition of their understanding of a 'learning society', it is clear that each has a vision for society in which:

- education in all its forms is held in high esteem by government, business, the community and individuals as a prerequisite for a strong economy, a democratic and cohesive society and a peaceful world
- education is considered as a lifelong process available to all citizens in ways that will enable them to reach their full potential regardless of their background

While the reports are unequivocal in their belief in the vision of a universal learning society, they recognise that a diversity of cultures and contents currently exists. They accept therefore that different countries will be starting from different positions, that they will adopt different strategies and that they will progress at different rates in their quest to becoming learning societies.

To emphasise the new, broader view of lifelong learning the UNESCO conference (1997) refers to the 'four pillars of learning', namely:

- learning to know (general education)
- learning to do (vocational education)
- learning to live together and learning to live with others (civics education)
- learning to be (personal development)

This broader view clearly sees a role for all education sectors and in particular, VET and ACE.

Learning societies, lifelong learning and ACE

If becoming a learning society is the vision, or the ultimate goal, then lifelong learning provides the conceptual framework through which to achieve that vision. Adult and community education is a significant component of lifelong learning and ACE shares the values and principles that underpin the concept of lifelong learning—that is to say, it has the same commitment to student centredness, to achieving access for all, and to working closely with its local community.

The OECD conference 'How Adults Learn', held in Washington DC in 1998, emphasised the pivotal importance of the following three structures to the creation of a learning society (OECD 1998a):

- a sound formal education system
- a comprehensive workplace education and training system
- a vibrant community-based learning system

Preconditions for lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is conditional upon three factors. First, there must be a desire or will to learn. The literature on participation contains many references to reluctant learners who, if not required or persuaded to participate will choose not to do so.

Second, to be able to participate in lifelong learning, individuals must possess the necessary educational foundations. This means they must possess a degree of literacy and numeracy as well as having acquired the skill of learning how to learn.

In theory at least, achieving these two prerequisites is considered to be the prime objective of compulsory education. That is to say, on leaving school students are presumed to be functionally literate and numerate, to possess a thirst for knowledge and to have acquired the skill to use information technology. In practice, however, it is evident that, for a whole range of reasons, many students pass through the system without acquiring one or more of the above prerequisites. In its role as a provider of 'second-chance' education, the ACE sector has played, and continues to play, a valuable role in creating a re-entry point to lifelong learning.

Having satisfied the first two conditions, 'motivation' and 'capacity', a third is necessary if lifelong learning is to occur. This involves the availability of suitable education programs, appropriate facilities, adequate information and suitable learning support. ACE, with its nationwide network of learning centres with their 'adult-friendly' learning environments, provides an important part of the solution.

Influence of reports and conferences

Given the number of recent Australian reports/inquiries and subsequent recommendations made, has anything actually changed in practice? This question was put to some of the key stakeholders responsible for policy development, and for the delivery of ACE programs at State level. In particular, stakeholders were asked to indicate what effect, if any, the various reports have had on ACE in terms of, the level of awareness, the level of funding, the level of participation and the quality of policy initiatives undertaken.

Generally speaking, stakeholders felt that the inquiries and reports had done much to raise the image of ACE. In particular they pointed to the positive effect of ACE being recognised as a fourth sector of education, a situation largely attributable to the 1991 Senate inquiry *Come in Cinderella*. Furthermore, stakeholders believed that the recognition has done much to give ACE providers the confidence and additional funding to venture beyond their traditional areas of activity.

The Commonwealth Government's continued support for the work of the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce, with its pivotal role as an advocate for the sector, is also attributed to the influence of the reports and inquiries.

A commitment to ACE

The positive views of past reports, conferences and inquiries were not shared by all stakeholders. A small but articulate group, while not disagreeing with the content of the reports felt the pace of change was too slow. This group highlighted the continuation of the vocational-non-vocational divide as well as to the inadequate data collection mechanisms. They also believed that, despite the strong support accorded ACE throughout the various reports, low levels of participation by targeted groups needed to be addressed.

Furthermore, while the reports and conferences stressed the notion of the primacy of the learner and the importance of education being learner centred, a significant number of classrooms and lecture theatres still operate largely in a teacher-centred way. A similar observation was made in regard to the important areas of access and equity. As evidence, one ACE manager pointed to a reduction in the level of funding for fee concessions over the past two years. The Executive Director of AAACE summed up the reservations expressed by several of the stakeholders in his observation that, 'the unequivocal support for lifelong learning given by the Commonwealth Government has yet to manifest itself in action' (Crombie A, 1998, pers. comm.).

However, it was generally believed that while the move to a learning society would not happen overnight, it would definitely happen, and that ACE would play a pivotal role. At the same time, there was an acceptance by stakeholders of the reality of current government budgeting: that, despite their stated support for lifelong learning and for ACE, governments are already committed to a compulsory education sector and that competition for scarce and finite resources was a reality in today's world. It was also understood that, given commitment to the learning society, governments wherever possible would ensure equitable distribution of these resources across all education sectors.

Information technology, lifelong learning and ACE

Much has been written about the way in which information and communication technology will impact on every aspect of our lives and the accompanying discussion papers, 'Widening participation in ACE' and 'Who uses ACE: future demand', look at the impact of IT on the nature of ACE programs, on new learning opportunities and on the market share. In contrast, this paper looks at the importance of IT on lifelong learning and therefore ACE. The advent of increasingly accessible, highly interactive global information networks, promises a degree of responsiveness and a level of learner centredness often talked about but rarely achieved within the current education structures. When used appropriately as a delivery tool, IT offers learners real choices about what they learn, where they learn (at home, at work, in the local learning centre), when they learn, and the pace at which they progress. This will have a profound impact on all education sectors including ACE.

Moreover, the use of on-line programs has resulted in a change in the way people learn: more and more people are choosing to engage in discovery learning, project-based learning and action learning. The implementation of IT in education is also bringing about a change in the student–teacher relationships. For example, in an IT setting teachers cease to be major sources of knowledge. Thus their roles are changing from being directive to being facilitators and providers of support.

To take advantage of the vast body of information available via the global information networks, learners will require a whole new set of skills. They will, for example, need to acquire the ability:

- to use technology to find and retrieve information
- to analyse and synthesise that information
- to make judgements about the relative worth of that information

In addition, to enable them to make informed choices about the range of options offered by the learner-centred environment, learners will need to be aware of their own preferred learning style.

The involvement of the learner in making choices about the content, the method and mode of delivery accords with the principles underpinning lifelong learning. It is fair to say that, if applied creatively, IT will, over time, play a significant role in furthering lifelong learning and in shaping Australia into a learning society.

It must be stated, however, that the concepts of lifelong learning and a learning society are not necessarily linked to, or dependent on, IT. Nevertheless, used creatively IT can play a pivotal role in the implementation of lifelong learning since it has the potential to overcome a number of the acknowledged barriers to participation. For example, IT can help to overcome the barriers of:

- *distance and isolation*, by providing electronic communication links
- *irrelevance*, by providing access to a far greater range of courses
- *inadequate quality*, by providing the potential to link learners to the very best programs the world has to offer
- *cost*, by spreading development costs across the vast number of national or even international learners
- *time and place*, by offering a level of flexibility which transcends both

The role of government/s in implementing lifelong learning

To provide leadership—In making an 'unequivocal' commitment to lifelong learning (DEETYA 1998), the Federal Government is setting the tone and providing important leadership. The extent to which it will actually become involved in supporting the implementation of strategies to foster lifelong learning is considered later in the paper under the heading of 'Federal/State Government nexus'.

To create a shared vision—Governments have an important role to play in encouraging debate on issues associated with lifelong learning, the ultimate aim being the development of a vision shared by stakeholders and the creation of a set of common goals and strategic objectives. Ideally, these objectives would be expressed in measurable outcome terms to enable the success of the strategies to be evaluated, although this is not always possible.

To co-ordinate the effort—Given the number of sectors and departments involved at Federal and State levels, the Commonwealth Government has an important role to play in co-ordinating the effort to implement lifelong learning strategies. This role could include the establishment of a national body to facilitate collaboration between education sectors, industry, other government departments and the community, in order to effect the transformation to a learning society.

The UK government, in its response to the report *Learning works* (Kennedy 1997), acknowledges the importance of collaboration between the education sectors, industry, local and national government, as well as within the sectors. The UK government blames earlier excessive emphasis on market competition for inhibiting collaboration and, as a result has established a Collaboration Fund to redress the situation and to promote partnerships within, and beyond the further education sector (Blunkett 1998, p. 9).

To stimulate demand for learning—The Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with State departments of education and training, will need to provide and promote quality information, advice and guidance about lifelong learning opportunities. Lack of appropriate information has, in the past been cited as a possible barrier to participation.

To use funding as a lever for change—Funding in all its forms—grants, tax concessions or fee concessions—has the potential to be a powerful lever for advancing lifelong learning. That lever can be used in the following ways:

- to 'pump-prime' initiatives such as encouraging companies to become learning organisations

- ❖ to increase participation from educationally disadvantaged groups through the allocation of targeted funds and fee concessions
- ❖ to address a range of identified barriers to participation such as the cost of tuition, the cost of transport and the cost of child care

To apply a whole-of-government approach—Lifelong learning must not be seen as the sole responsibility of Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Departments of Health, Science, Primary Industry, the Arts and Environment all have distinct roles to play in contributing to the formal and non-formal education of the nation.

To support research—The government has a significant role to play in encouraging research and debate on the respective roles that each of the education sectors should play in implementing lifelong learning, in addition to the way in which they relate to one another. Suggestions for further research are offered in the final section of this paper.

To support the use of information technology—Because of the size and complexity of the challenge implied by the adoption of lifelong learning, the government has a special role to play in supporting the development and use of information technology as a tool for providing universal access to education and training. In particular, it needs to support and co-ordinate the development of quality, interactive multimedia courseware , since it is important that Australia is not merely a user of courseware developed in other countries. Financial support is also necessary to assist providers in upgrading their learning environments and in upskilling their staff in IT areas.

Given its regulatory powers, the government is well positioned to require broadcasters to play a more significant part in using the communications arena to further lifelong learning.

At a macro level, governments also have the capacity to form powerful partnerships with companies and organisations. In this way, innovative, collaborative initiatives can be developed.

Strategic approach by governments

The creation of a learning society will require governments to support comprehensive strategies within an agreed national framework. This will avoid duplication of effort and link sectors more closely. In order to ensure progress towards this important goal, the national framework will work towards:

- ❖ establishing a national body to foster lifelong learning and to co-ordinate the creation of a learning society
- ❖ developing key policy directions, goals, strategic objectives and targets
- ❖ encouraging government departments and agencies to become learning organisations by promoting the adoption of principles of lifelong learning into departments' mission statements
- ❖ developing incentives to ensure support from industry to provide learning opportunities, both general and vocational, for the workforce
- ❖ providing incentives for encouraging participation in lifelong learning in an attempt to raise the number and level of minimum qualifications, particularly within the under-30 age group
- ❖ facilitating the use of technology for education and training that promotes lifelong learning and community development
- ❖ providing support to enable communities to become part of learning cities' networks
- ❖ integrating Adult Learners' Week into a lifelong learning policy framework

- establishing a 'national equity fund' to enable providers to target groups currently under-represented in education and training

The role of the ACE sector in furthering lifelong learning

The ACE Taskforce

Established by the Commonwealth Government, the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce represents the interests of ACE providers across the nation. As such it is well positioned to foster lifelong learning and contribute to the development of a learning society. It can do this by:

- encouraging collaboration and development of linkages between the various peak bodies/providers of adult education, thus facilitating a more cohesive sector
- ensuring the resultant sector works closely with other government agencies to develop the vision, goals and strategic priorities, which will provide the impetus for Australia to become a learning society
- encapsulating that vision in the national ACE policy, and ensuring ongoing support for the policy
- monitoring the implementation of the policy and modifying the strategies accordingly
- working towards establishing, at systems level, appropriate linkages, and perhaps partnerships, with other education sectors in order to create educational pathways and to maximise the use of resources
- continuing to broaden the sector's program base, particularly in the area of accredited courses and services to industry
- identifying and disseminating examples of best practice in working with equity target groups such as Aboriginal people, the disabled and the aged
- continuing to undertake market research on behalf of the sector, identifying new market niches and helping to market products and services at national level
- improving the profile of ACE by promoting the inherent value of learning by staging activities such as 'Adult Learners Week'
- providing ministers with information to ensure that they understand the cost-effective contribution ACE makes to the education of a growing proportion of the post-school population
- assisting the Federal and State governments to modify education policies and funding mechanisms to reflect a commitment to lifelong learning
- working with the Federal Government and State governments to review the policies and mechanisms for collecting data in order to give a true picture of the total ACE effort

ACE providers

As in the case of governments, ACE providers must lead by example; that is, by:

- modelling the lifelong learning ethos and operating as learning organisations. Teachers and managers must themselves, be committed lifelong learners
- investing in IT so that ACE providers have the knowledge and facilities to offer learners access to global information networks and to computer-assisted learning
- participating in the development of courseware suitable for use within the IT environment

- encouraging discussion and debate at community level and involving the community in shaping the direction of local provision
- engendering a desire for learning by promoting the benefits of lifelong learning to individuals, communities and employers
- providing ready access to 'second chance' opportunities for individuals who have not acquired the necessary educational building blocks for lifelong learning
- being demand-driven in programs offered and learner centred in delivery methods used in order to remove barriers to participation and to attract reluctant learners

The learners

As recipients of lifelong learning, learners have a vested interest in furthering its cause. They can do this by:

- looking on participation in lifelong learning as a significant life investment since it will affect all aspects of their life including employability, social standing, general health and ability to contribute to the workplace, to the community and to society
- becoming empowered, self-directed learners aware of their preferred learning style, who will choose wisely from a range of learning options and who will demand a quality service
- becoming technologically literate in order to access and interact with global information networks

Federal–State government nexus

In its response to *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997), the government reminds us that the primary responsibility for the ACE sector rests with the States, and withholds support for a number of recommendations on the grounds that, '. . . they are matters for consideration by State Governments' (DEETYA 1998, p. 10), thereby begging the question of where jurisdiction for ACE should lie.

Although the Commonwealth Government has given an unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and to the promotion of a learning society, it is difficult to see how this commitment will be realised as long as the primary responsibility for the school, VET and ACE sectors lies with the States. While it is not within the scope of this paper to explore the complexities of Federal–State relations, it is nevertheless, illuminating to briefly reflect on the UK situation, which offers both parallels with, as well as noticeable differences between that of Australia.

The UK government has made an almost identical commitment to lifelong learning and to the establishment of a learning society. However, this government has agreed to back that commitment with an additional $200 million over the coming year. Moreover, the funds have been targeted mainly at those sectors of the population currently under-represented.

There is another noticeable difference between the UK and Australian situations, which deserves serious consideration. In Australia VET and ACE operate as separate sectors, but in the United Kingdom they have been combined under the banner of further education. Such a model dispenses with the difficulty of having to define two education sectors (ACE and VET) whose roles increasingly overlap. Above all, the UK further education model through its single national funding council, enables the government to use funding as a powerful lever to correct historic inequities, to widen participation and to achieve its goal of creating a nation of learners.

The counter argument to unification of VET and ACE in Australia, and expressed in the other papers in this series, is that with such a union, ACE is likely to lose its distinctive characteristics.

The wisdom of entering into closer working relationships with the VET sector and establishing clear pathways between sectors has been accepted at State level by a number of ACE agencies. The most recent example is reported on below.

ACE–VET partnerships

Earlier in 1998, Tasmania completed a major restructuring of its TAFE system. The State is now served by five institutes, one of which will become the Institute of Adult Education and Community Services. When consulted, the statewide program manager pointed to the high profile accorded adult education in Tasmania and listed the benefits associated with having equal rights of access to the facilities and resources of the public VET provider.

The responsive arm

The Tasmanian experience is not unique. Other examples of ACE–VET partnerships exist in at least two other States namely, South Australia and Western Australia.

The manager of an ACE unit in South Australia, which is successfully partnered in the same location as a TAFE institute, observed that the public saw the unit as the institute's 'responsive' arm. The manager attributes this claim to the more flexible approach of ACE to staffing, its less bureaucratic administration and its culture of innovation and customer service.

In this particular partnership, the ACE unit, in addition to offering its traditional program of general adult education and adult basic education, has undertaken to provide a range of other services. These include employment preparation, staff development for hourly paid instructors, skill analysis and short-term, in-house training for local enterprises. In short, the unit provides a whole range of services which are important to the community but which the institute was unable to meet.

A passion for ACE

One of the most striking features of the consultation process (formal and informal) was the deep-seated passion for ACE held by managers and practitioners. It appeared to be a passion based on a belief in the ability of ACE to help all individuals, regardless of their position in society, throughout their lives. It is a belief that ACE, more than any other sector, understands the primacy of the learner and the importance of involving the learner in shaping the education process.

When asked to explain the uniqueness of their sector, ACE providers referred to their ability to respond with speed and appropriately to the needs of individuals and at times to whole communities. They further referred to the relatively low demand they make on the public purse and to their high level of self-sufficiency and independence. Most importantly, they refer to the close relationship established with learners and their communities (many are community owned and managed) and to the resultant high levels of client satisfaction.

When asked to explain how the ACE sector acquired these features, respondents refer to one or more of the following:

- the sector's historic commitment to the principles of adult learning; that is, the use of teaching methods which take account of the way adults learn
- the sector's relatively small size and non-bureaucratic structure
- the sector's understanding of the reality of the open market in which adult learners will only make the financial and time commitment in a program believed to be relevant and cost-effective
- the sector's commitment to continuous improvement by listening to its learners and to the communities to which they belong

The national ACE policy has as its number one goal 'realising the potential of ACE to contribute to Australia becoming a learning nation'. To achieve this goal it proposes to build on the features set out above. In particular, it proposes to focus on the quality of its customer service and on ensuring that government, communities and individuals are aware of that quality. The policy also notes the need to promote the sector by showcasing its innovative practices and by raising awareness among stakeholders of its potential to contribute to the economic and social goals of Australia.

Further research

During the course of reviewing the literature and consulting the stakeholders the following areas were identified as being worthy of further research.

Professional development for ACE workers

ACE providers have always had a high dependence on contract staff. This has been seen as a strength in that it made for greater flexibility, cost-effectiveness and provided a valuable link between industry and the learning environment. However, while access to appropriate, timely and adequate staff development is important, its provision to contract staff is clearly more difficult and problematic. As the full-time workforce continues to decrease, the challenge of providing and maintaining the skill levels for contract staff will increase. This paper recommends research to identify the nature and magnitude of potential problems in this area and subsequent development of strategies for dealing with them.

Information and communication technology and ACE

While this paper has dealt briefly with information technology and its likely impact on lifelong learning and ACE, the topic deserves to be the subject of a research project in its own right. Such a project would look at a range of issues including:

- the impact of IT on the nature of ACE programs offered
- the nature and magnitude of IT-related professional development required by ACE staff (teaching and administrative)
- the impact of IT on the collection and processing of ACE data and the development of statistics
- the impact of IT on the physical infrastructure, the work-stations and the learning environments
- the impact on ACE providers of readily accessible, quality, interactive, global information networks
- the impact of on-line delivery in addressing access and equity issues
- the potential of IT to support the concept of lifelong learning
- the process for ensuring an IT-literate approach to ACE learning practice.

Linkages and partnerships

The concerns associated with entering into partnerships with other education sectors, and in particular with the VET sector, have been touched on in each of the companion papers. A significant number of stakeholders believe that the advantages of such partnerships (for example, improved economies of scale and educational pathways) are outweighed by the potential loss of the characteristics that make ACE accessible to an important section of the community.

The issue is of sufficient importance to warrant research in order to:

- identify examples (from Australia and overseas) of partnerships, joint ventures and collaboration between education sectors and in particular with the ACE sector
- report on the success of the processes used in bringing about such partnerships/linkages
- identify both the benefits and the difficulties associated with such partnerships
- comment on the role of the various stakeholders in establishing these inter-sectoral relationships

Creating a learning culture

The creation of an effective learning culture is dependent on changing people's perceptions about the notion and value of learning. If changing people's perception about learning, and if stimulating demand for learning are seen as central to creating a learning culture then it would seem appropriate to propose a research project which will:

- undertake a literature search on learning towns, cities and communities
- propose a range of strategies which, if implemented, are likely to further the development of a learning culture, drawing upon past successes of cultural change (for example, equal opportunity, women in sport, sun protection and the environment)

Conclusion

After a long gestation period, lifelong learning has at last achieved international recognition as one of the keys to a vibrant, economically healthy, and socially cohesive nation, a nation in which everyone has a stake in their own future and in the future of their community.

In Australia that recognition came with the Commonwealth Government giving an unequivocal commitment to lifelong learning and to the development of a learning society. At the same time the government has undertaken to modify its policies and funding mechanisms in order to meet that commitment.

Having made the commitment the government is now faced with the challenge of creating a clear vision for introducing lifelong learning, a vision that is underpinned by a set of goals and strategic objectives and shared by the key agencies (health, environment, arts and education) whose purpose it is to systematically improve the learning opportunities for all Australians throughout their lives. To realise such a vision requires the support and commitment of key industry and community bodies.

This discussion paper argues the case for the universal adoption of lifelong learning as imperative to enable individuals and communities to operate effectively in the 21st century. The paper suggests that conditions for creating a learning culture have never been more propitious, and concludes by arguing that the ACE sector, with its historic commitment to learner centredness and its proven ability to be responsive, is in a prime position to provide the leadership to play an important role in partnership with other sectors in transforming Australia into a learning society.

4 Community in ACE

Executive summary

Currently, and coinciding with renewed interest in concepts such as 'lifelong learning' and 'learning societies', the adult education sector is experiencing a resurgence of interest. Adults across the world are returning to study for varied and diverse reasons.

In Australia, in addition to provision of adult education in publicly funded education institutions, such as universities and TAFE institutes, adult learning activities are also offered by a large number of private-sector agencies responding to community demands. Generally, these organisations offer adult and community education, which is defined as the post-secondary component of lifelong learning and which is undertaken by adults in order to enrich their lives or enhance their vocational options.

In Australia about 10 per cent of all of this activity is believed to be generated by not-for-profit community-owned and managed organisations. The focus of this paper is on these organisations; that is, the organisations which are *community-owned and managed and which provide, to a greater or lesser degree, adult education to members of their community.*

In addition to describing community-owned and managed ACE provision, the paper sets out the organisational structures applying to the States and Territories.

Community-based ACE

The community-based sector is vital to encouraging people into the educational environment, particularly those with limited experience of education, or who have been disaffected by experiences of formal institutionalised education.

The ACFEB (1998b, p. 4) has adopted the following 'five core values for ACE':

> *ACE is learner centred*
>
> *ACE has education at its core*
>
> *ACE is community-owned and driven*
>
> *ACE values and promotes diversity*
>
> *ACE is adaptive, responsive and innovative*

ACE providers vary in the size and scope of their operations from large metropolitan community colleges to centres such as neighbourhood houses, which typically receive a small amount of financial support from local government or community organisations, use volunteers and community premises and concentrate their efforts on the provision of basic, community-identified educational activities.

Features of community-based provision

Community responsiveness and control—Community-owned and managed provision is flexible in approach and responsive to community needs and aspirations.

Value of volunteerism and *participation in the process*—Volunteerism in the community-based sector has two major effects. These are the capacity of individuals to participate and develop and the contribution made to provision of a low-cost service.

First step and re-entry—In 1991 the Victorian Government acknowledged that 'many women and men make adult, community and further education their first step towards vocational and higher education. Others use it as a pathway to enter or return to the paid workforce' (ACFEB 1991). The ACE sector also provides an attractive option for older, recently unemployed workers to undertake 'retraining' for vocational purposes or to enable them to adjust to their changed circumstances.

Community-based organisations which assist people into work or educational pathways recognise the importance of their role in reducing social isolation, promoting self-esteem and encouraging people to become more informed citizens.

Issues for community-managed ACE

ACE and VET

In recent years, there has been an increasing participation by ACE providers in VET programs particularly in New South Wales and Victoria. This is an acknowledgement of the capacity of ACE to offer educational courses with nationally recognised outcomes. Many ACE providers have, in the interests of their communities and individual learners, enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to enter into the provision of VET programs through the competitive tendering processes. This has led to a very large increase in funds available to community-based providers with a concomitant increase in service provision to their communities.

ACE outcomes

In addition to 'key outcomes' such as increased confidence and skills in management, improved decision-making processes and increased participation rates and opportunities for participants brought about by growth and diversity, other outcomes in community-based centres include: achievement of certified course outcomes, student outcomes and increased enrolments; increase in the number and diversity of courses and increased funding and income.

A common goal

ACE and VET have complementary roles in addressing the lifelong learning needs and aspirations of Australians. Clearly there are tensions between increased participation of ACE providers in the training market and the preservation of 'traditional ACE values' which have led to a wide variety of opinions within the sector.

The challenge

A challenge remains to achieve substantial recognition of the value of traditional ACE outcomes among policy and decision-makers as an accepted part of the education environment. Governments have recognised and acknowledged the 'economic value of ACE' to the community. However, given an environment where the value of educational and personal development outcomes is measured in terms of their economic value, the challenge for the taskforce is to develop comparative quantitative information on the economic value of ACE.

The issues

Despite perceived improvements, clearly there are significant incongruities between national policy aspirations of systematic and structural support in each State and Territory, and allocation of funding and resources based on clear and consistent principles, and the States' and Territories responses to those policy aspirations.

It is also clear, particularly given the nature of the sector, structuring cannot be imposed. Governments are, however, in a strong position to influence the speed, nature and extent of development in structural arrangements for the sector within their jurisdiction. In its response to *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997), the Commonwealth Government's adoption of a leadership role in this area has begun.

Adult education in general, and ACE in particular, must find and establish a place in the changing national education system worthy of its aims, ideals and recognised benefits. There is value for all governments in promoting the benefits of lifelong learning through community adult education as well as fostering greater provision and encouraging wider participation, not only in terms of general economic development but also in the context of improved community cohesion, health and development.

Context and scope of the paper

Currently, and coinciding with renewed interest in concepts such as 'lifelong learning' and 'learning societies', the adult education sector is experiencing a resurgence of interest. Adults across the world are returning to study for varied and diverse reasons; for example, they may wish to:

- acquire formal qualifications in professions and occupations to upgrade skills in existing vocational areas
- qualify for new vocational areas for the purposes of job change or entering paid employment
- improve, by acquiring new skills and knowledge, quality of life—as members of society, of specific communities and of families
- acquire as adults, primary and secondary education skills missed when younger
- learn English as a second language

Mature-age learners are studying alongside the more traditional learners in all of the publicly funded education bodies—in schools, universities and TAFE institutes—participating in the institution's core education activity. Most of these organisations also offer courses specifically designed to cater for the needs of the adult education market. Such courses reflect individual institutions' specific expertise or the specific needs of the constituency.

Moreover, there is an unknown number of private-sector agencies responding to community demands and a significant number of adult learning activities running for private profit. Many churches, local organisations, self-help groups and other non-government agencies organise education programs. A large number of Australians organise their own regular book discussion groups and participate in internet-based learning. Governments at every level fund education in areas such as environmental care, health and the arts. Publicly and privately owned media agencies offer adult community education. All of these bodies provide education services to adult learners eager to acquire knowledge and information, either to enrich their lives or to enhance their vocational options. Generally, these organisations offer ACE, which is defined as the post-secondary component of lifelong learning, which is primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with the provision of general adult education (personal development and enrichment), adult basic education (literacy and numeracy), English as a second language, vocational orientation, and public education (environment, health).

In Australia about 10 per cent of all of this activity is believed to be generated by not-for-profit, community-owned and managed organisations. The focus of this paper is on these organisations; that is, the organisations which are *community-owned and managed and which provide, to a greater or lesser degree, adult education to members of their community. Community-*

owned and managed implies, in general terms, that organisations included in the 'community-based' sector are required to be incorporated (under appropriate State laws) and make provision for, for example, open membership and a community-sourced management committee.

Community is understood to include the 'local community' (geographical proximity), the 'broader community or community at large', or persons with a 'community of interest', whether based on issues, ethnicity, or some other parameter. The Victorian Adult, Community and Further Education Board offers the following definition: 'Most commonly the community is a neighbourhood, but it can also be a group of people with special interests, such as a Statewide ethnic organisation, or of a common age, such as a branch of U3A [University of the Third Age]' (ACFEB 1997a, p. 17). Increasingly in the 'information age', however, a community could be linked through the Internet or similar arrangement.

Community-based ACE

The community-based sector is vital to encouraging people into the educational environment, particularly those with limited experience of education, or who have been disaffected by experiences of formal institutionalised education. At the 1998 OECD conference 'What Makes a Learning Society' (OECD 1998) the importance of community-based learning was emphasised and, together with a strong formal education sector and a commitment to education and training in industry, community-based learning was considered fundamental to any claim to being a learning society, and to holding a commitment to lifelong learning.

In commending its 1991 *Adult, Community and Further Education Bill* (Vic) to the Parliament, the Victorian Government noted that:

> *Adult, community and further education is a large and diverse education sector. Through community-based, responsive, flexible and innovative programs, it makes a substantial contribution to Victoria's economic, social and cultural development.* (ACFEB 1991)

and that the sector:

> *. . . provides and promotes learning opportunities for adults in a manner and environment appropriate to their needs*
>
> *. . . supports and strengthens the capacity of local communities to respond and meet educational needs of their members*
>
> *. . . provides opportunities for adults to prepare for and undertake formal education.*

According to McIntyre et al. (1995, p. 67) the community-owned and managed sector 'accounts for 7–10 per cent of course activity', a situation that 'may obscure its importance for particular groups of learners . . . whose needs might not be met otherwise, or not met so convivially' (p. 71). McIntyre et al. (1995, p. 67) also found that in the ACE sector in NSW it is 'three times more likely' that women will take an ACE course thus 'highlighting the importance of ACE to access for women', and that 'about one-third of ACE activity is providing targeted programs for specific clienteles'.

The 1997 ACFEB annual report notes that 'there is an important conceptual difference between adult education in general and adult education in the community', and that community-based provision is 'a special subset of the vast array of organised learning activities currently available to adults' (ACFEB 1997a, p. 17).

Community-based providers are, as described earlier, typically of independent legal status, community-owned and directed and, 'to a greater or lesser extent, entrepreneurial' (AAACE 1991, p. 19). They 'open their doors because of community initiative and stay open while community support remains. Accountability is immediate and direct. While contributing to

adult education generally and to VET specifically, they also make a significant contribution to community development and self-reliance' (Schofield et al. 1996, p. 32).

The ACFEB (1998b, p. 4) has adopted the following 'five core values for ACE':

> *ACE is learner centred*
>
> *ACE has education at its core*
>
> *ACE is community-owned and driven*
>
> *ACE values and promotes diversity*
>
> *ACE is adaptive, responsive and innovative*

The sector is distinguished by its commitment to being largely demand driven. According to marketing information developed by the Victorian Division, in addition to adopting the above core values, ACE:

- is relevant, useful and high quality
- is socially accessible
- is personal and designed for adults
- has great teachers
- provides pathways to work and other learning
- improves vocational prospects through development of vocational skills
- provides for personal skill development
- enhances relationships
- involves community participation

In the view of Benn (1992, p. 66):

> *The most distinctive feature of adult learning centres and neighbourhood houses [which are community-based organisations] is that they are all managed by local people who are committed to the value of adult learning and who bring practical experience and local knowledge to their management. This means they can provide locally relevant educational opportunities for adults and respond to changes in society.*

The accuracy of this view is supported by 1995 NSW findings wherein a majority of respondents (89 per cent) rated the ACE course they had done as 'Very Good' or 'Good', and all of the respondents that had done an ACE course said that they would recommend doing an ACE courses to their friends (NSW BACE 1995, p. 16).

Benn (1992, pp. 67–68) further describes the major features of community-based provision as its:

- *pivotal nature*, because of the 'sheer magnitude' of its impact on the lives of adults and its concentration on 'useful knowledge', 'serious learning' and 'sustained study'
- *strength*, in that it draws on local knowledge to provide a framework for local provision, uses skills of management and teaching present in the community and develops the capacity of individuals to work collectively for the advancement of the community
- *flexibility*, in that it is provided in easily accessible and affordable locations, is quick to respond to 'changing socioeconomic imperatives' and the range of its subject matter is 'learner centred and wide'.

ACE providers

ACE providers vary in the size and scope of their operations. At one end of the community-based spectrum are centres which typically receive a small amount of financial support from

local government or community organisations (such as churches) to meet the costs of minimal part-time co-ordination and essential resources related to their ACE provision. Such bodies use volunteers and community premises and concentrate their efforts on the provision of basic, community-identified, educational activities.

At the other end are organisations exemplified by one NSW metropolitan community college which in 1995 had:

- 16 000 enrolments in 1500 courses
- 17 learning centres
- 262 389 student contact hours (12 per cent in VET courses)
- 10 full-time and (approx.) 380 part-time staff
- income of 1.3 million from all sources
- income of 1.06 million from course fees

Features of community-based provision

Kearns (1998, p. 4) sees community-based organisations as having an active interest in promoting lifelong learning by 'becoming active contributors to a learning society and supporting the development of their community as a learning community with enhanced quality of life'.

Among the diverse range of adult education providers, the community-based sector has particular attributes which set it apart in the pursuit of this goal. The following four attributes are considered the most significant.

Community responsiveness and control

While all providers of adult education programs (and indeed adult learning experiences) would argue that they are flexible in their approach and responsive to community needs and aspirations, it is the community-owned and managed model which most truly exemplifies this claim.

In Victoria, where the community-owned and managed sector *is* ACE and 'the community driven nature of ACE is its single most important defining feature' (ACFEB 1997a, p. 17), the ACFE Board strongly supports the value and advantages of ACE. It argues that ACE providers are:

> cost-efficient, *because for the most part they use buildings which have outlasted their original purpose, and because they supplement paid coordinators and teachers with volunteers*
>
> flexible and innovative, *because without much in the way of purpose built structures and elaborate hierarchies, they adapt quickly to changing educational needs and pioneer sunrise educational initiatives (some later taken up by post secondary institutions)*
>
> responsive, *because voluntary committees of management are drawn from local communities, and communities of interest, have extensive knowledge of and links into those communities, are answerable to those communities, and exist to serve the needs of their communities*
>
> accessible, *because there are over 450 (venues) across the State*
>
> confident and competitive *in the educational market place because their existence and success are dependent on market responsiveness*
>
> proudly and even fiercely independent, *because they prize their self determining status*

> strengtheners of social fabric, *because they both draw on and enhance positive community values and community responsibility, and promote the autonomy of communities.* (ACFEB 1997c, pp. 2–3)

The New South Wales Board of Adult and Community Education (NSW BACE 1997) claims that 'nothing can match ACE for knowledge of local communities'.

Value of volunteerism

The extent of voluntary participation in ACE organisations varies considerably across the spectrum. In general terms there is an inverse relationship between organisation size and reliance on volunteer effort, with involvement in the larger centres often being restricted to service on the committee of management.

However, 'volunteerism' in the community-based sector has two major effects:

- the capacity of individuals to participate and develop
- the contribution to provision of a low-cost service

The role of the volunteer is exemplified by one regional council in New South Wales. Their *Volunteers' resource kit* (Loddon Campaspe Mallee Region 1997) describes a volunteer as, 'A representative of the community who freely chooses to give time, skills and experience to support an organisation'.

It is axiomatic that the use of well-motivated and trained volunteers leads to significant financial benefits for the organisation. The majority of smaller centres would be unable to continue operating, providing their preferred service, if it were not for voluntary input. This attitude is supported by NSW BACE (1996b) and the ACFEB (1997c). The latter attributes the cost efficiencies which characterise the sector, at least in part, to the involvement of volunteers.

The Western Australian situation is typical, where, of the 80 neighbourhood houses and learning centres, approximately half receive no education funding at all while 'some' receive minimal support from local councils or churches, and others undertake functions funded through family and community services sources. Such a community-based sector could not operate without significant contribution from volunteers. The sector therefore regards volunteers as a valuable, respected resource. The sector also has, as a prime objective, the provision of development opportunities for volunteers which ultimately benefit the organisation, the individual and the community.

Participation in the process

The most valued aspect of the community-based model is the opportunity afforded community members (usually volunteers) to participate in the organisation at a range of levels, to develop knowledge and skills through that participation and to progress to more complex functions within, or beyond, the organisation. In the view of Robertson and Shearwood (n.d.) such learning and skill development is neglected in other settings.

In 1984 Benson et al. stated that 'Community providers believe that each experience, from leaving home to joining the Committee has an equal potential for learning and personal development. The process a person goes through is just as important as the program' (Benson et al. 1984, p. 15). This outcome remains valid today.

Participation by members of the community contributes directly to the achievement of aspects of three of the 'four pillars of education' adopted by UNESCO (Delors 1998b, pp. 85–97; ACFEB 1998b, p. 4), namely:

- *learning to do*, by developing not only occupational skills but also the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams

- *learning to live together, learning to live with others*, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence—carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts—in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace
- *learning to be*, to better develop the capacity of the individual to act with ever-greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility as well as take on the responsibility for the development of their individual potential

While opportunities for direct and continuous involvement by community members will, naturally, be available more readily in the smaller organisations, the larger providers maintain that the concept of participation is significant to their role.

For example, WEA Sydney, a large provider of adult education programs has as its mission, in addition to the provision of 'stimulating and varied educational activities', 'encouraging students to participate in . . . WEA's democratic management structure'.

The Workers' Educational Association of South Australia maintains that it is committed to:

- providing opportunities for enriching learning experiences which empower people
- encouraging active community participation in its organisation
- working towards a more just, equal, open and democratic society

In 1997 the ACFEB (1997a, p. 18) acknowledged that ACE continues to provide educational opportunities to adults which address:

- their personal development
- their contribution to economic development through the paid and unpaid workforce
- their participation as citizens in Australia's democratic institutions and public life

The Commonwealth Government's Discovering Democracy program represents a major policy initiative—the development in all sectors of Australian society of a greater understanding of civics and citizenship issues, including increased participation by individuals in society. The objectives of this program encompass the acquisition of relevant knowledge but, more particularly, the development of personal skills, attitudes and values that enable individuals to participate effectively in the political process and contribute to the healthy functioning of our political system and to the promotion of a civil society. The adult and community education sector is specifically identified as a key sector in delivery of this program.

First step and re-entry

The value of educational outcomes is, increasingly, being assessed in narrow vocational terms. Achievement of such outcomes often requires participation, eventually, in formal, institutionalised, VET or higher education.

In 1991 the Victorian Government acknowledged that 'many women and men make adult, community and further education their first step towards vocational and higher education. Others use it as a pathway to enter or return to the paid workforce' (ACFEB 1991). The current Victorian government policy (ACFEB 1997c, p. 3) acknowledges the need to 'emphasise the role of ACE in providing entry points for lifelong education and skills acquisition (for young people) where VCE or TAFE programs may not be immediately relevant'. Furthermore, the NSW BACE (1997) notes that 'ACE adult education programs serve the VET system by offering an alternative entry point for students into a wide range of major-award vocational courses in ACE and elsewhere'.

The ACE sector also provides an attractive option for older, recently unemployed workers to undertake 'retraining' for vocational purposes or to enable them to adjust to their changed circumstances.

The South Australian Adult Community Education Unit found that the low self-confidence/esteem, which can be generated by previous educational experience, is a 'major dispositional barrier in ACE and education generally' and concluded that:

> *Many of the ACE programs which are not vocationally oriented actually have a major outcome of improving self confidence thus making an indirect pathway to further study and employment. Community providers such as neighbourhood houses are well placed to address self confidence issues through the informal learning that takes place in them.* (DETAFE 1995, pp. 10–11)

Community-based organisations which assist people into work or educational pathways recognise the importance of their role in reducing social isolation, promoting self-esteem and encouraging people to become more informed citizens.

By way of example, the pathway to formal VET qualifications in Western Australia is often from the community sector through informal adult community education provided in an institutional setting. The smaller providers (neighbourhood houses and learning centres) are vital feeders to the more formal ACE providers which are, in turn, vital providers to VET institutions. In Victoria a number of ACE providers now have registration to deliver VET accredited courses in a community setting.

As noted in the paper 'Seamlessness: The convergences for ACE' (ACFEB 1998d), a recent development in both South Australia and Victoria (at least) involves examination of pathways from the ACE sector to higher education by means of both articulation and 'special purpose' courses. Such developments will further enhance the importance of ACE as a significant entry point for a range of learners.

Each education sector must function effectively, and the 'learning pathways [must be] as navigable (visible and intelligible) as possible and allow students to cross sectors . . .' (ACFEB 1998d), if society is to benefit from the provision of adult education services. The community-owned and managed sector is therefore critical to the effectiveness of the post-secondary education system and makes an invaluable contribution to meeting the national aspiration for the creation and maintenance of 'numerous and diverse [seamless] pathways' to further education and training (ANTA n.d., pp. 5, 13).

Kearns (1998, p. 8) sees the 'foundations for a lifelong learning capability' as involving learning to learn skills, motivation and desire for learning and confidence to keep learning throughout life, and "personal mastery" as a basis for empowerment in work and society'.

It is a common objective of community-based organisations to not only address these concepts, but also to provide a safe learning environment which facilitates and supports personal choice, personal development and empowerment and self-paced learning. This position is reinforced by the ACFEB (1998a, p. 41) which found that 'learners who chose to pursue community-based adult education see this environment as conducive to effective learning . . .'.

Issues for community-managed ACE

ACE and VET

In recent years, there has been an increasing participation by ACE providers in VET programs, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria. This development is consistent with the desired outcomes of the national policy related to acknowledgment of the capacity of ACE to offer courses with nationally recognised outcomes and the expansion and diversification of the educational resource base.

In *Think local and compete*, Schofield et al. (1996, p. v) identify the need for community-based providers embracing the challenges of the training market, but identifies within this context two distinct roles for the provider:

- the *generic role* wherein, consistent with other training providers, outcomes must meet VET criteria
- the *value-adding role* which focuses on a 'strongly local, flexible, market driven and learner centred approach to community-based delivery primarily to individuals'.

Many ACE providers have, in the interests of their communities and individual learners, enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to enter into provision of VET programs through the competitive tendering processes. As noted below, this has led to a very large increase in funds available to community-based providers with a concomitant increase in service provision to their communities.

Smaller centres, however, in some States at least, view the increasing trend towards concentration on more formal, vocational outcomes-based, adult community education with concern and a degree of caution. They are acutely aware that participation in formal programs has the potential to jeopardise their independence, control and traditional objectives.

Competition, accountability and compliance

If organisations are to be supported by public funds then they can be expected to be accountable for their appropriate, efficient and effective use. However, in this context a major concern is that the requirements attached to government funds not only dictate their educational purpose but they also impose significant productivity, quality, data provision and accountability requirements. The compliance with the externally imposed accountability requirements can lead some organisations to question the 'cost' of receiving these funds.

The Victorian Adult, Community and Further Education Board notes that the motivation for development and growth in the sector through participation in the competitive training market includes:

> *enhanced quality of education through clearer educational objectives*
>
> *support for local diversity of provision within a widely accepted and well understood framework*
>
> *reliable, well understood, locally relevant and well respected pathways for students to paid and voluntary work, post secondary qualifications, civic involvement, and personal development*
>
> *greater capacity to draw on the best further education curriculum development initiatives*
>
> *a more focussed effort to improve professional development for further education teachers* (ACEFB 1997b, p. 5)

Larger institutions, for example the NSW evening and community college sector, and those smaller organisations which have embraced the new environment, would strongly support expanding participation in formal VET programs as addressing the emerging, significant needs of the community. They would also argue that, as a result, their funding base was being broadened and their position consolidated, and that they were being provided with an opportunity to improve provisions in priority areas through productive management of 'tendered' funds. Significantly, there is a strongly held view that participation in this market does not, and should not, distract them from the provision of 'adult education' as their core activity.

ACE in Victoria has clearly embraced the competitive education market, yet the ACFEB (1997c, p. 5) is aware that:

> *Many are critical of competition, especially between ACE providers, as antithetical to the co-operative history of adult education in the community. The driver of ACE has been community growth and most ACE providers have gladly and actively shared good*

ideas. On the other hand ACE is now in a competitive environment and must compete with the range of other types of providers . . . This situation is likely to intensify rather than weaken over time.

Whilst ACE is proving to be competitive and is experiencing unprecedented growth, the ACFE Board recognises that competitiveness and co-operation are in tension with each other. The Board will work to ensure that . . . these apparently conflicting pressures are creatively managed.

The ACFE Board (ACFEB 1997c, p. 6) goes on to claim that in Victoria:

Community providers with registration as private providers of accredited VET are testifying that the provision of VET in a community setting is an important option for members of their community who learn better in community settings. They are also testifying that general adult education remains intrinsic to their educational objectives.

Since Victoria in many ways sets the benchmarks for ACE provision it seems sensible, therefore, to consider Victoria as an example. It is not surprising, given the long tradition of adult education provision, and the strength and maturity of the ACE sector in Victoria, that there is scope for healthy debate upon ACE-related issues in this State.

As noted previously, the ACFE Board and sections of the ACE sector are clearly and strongly supportive of the direction currently being taken, while cognisant of the tensions and concerns that participation in accredited VET provision generates. Yet there are practitioners who have concerns about the direction the sector is taking in response to current education priorities and funding arrangements.

Lucardie (1997, p. 11), for example, articulates the view held by some practitioners that efforts to diversify have 'generated a greater dependency on government funds' and that 'the competition being forced upon all providers . . . is destabilising the community provider system . . .'.

In 1994 McIntyre anticipated that some smaller providers would opt out of the system and scale down to the minimum required to run a local service and that some larger providers, now almost fully self-funding, will also cut links and go their own way (McIntyre 1994, p. 185). This expectation, however, does not appear to have been realised.

'Who uses ACE: Future demand', a companion paper to this, cites evidence from 1994 that substantiates the claim that demand for skill-based programs was increasing, as was demand for certification in the form of attainment certificates. This research also acknowledges that the pressure for community providers to change is due, in part, to increased demand from participants. Certainly ACE providers who have readily entered into the competitive market believe that they are responding to the demands of their communities, which are themselves changing.

ACE outcomes

In addition to 'key outcomes' such as increased confidence and skills in management, improved decision-making processes and increased participation rates and opportunities for participants brought about by growth and diversity, other outcomes in community-based centres are measured in such terms as:

- achievement of certified course outcomes, student outcomes and increased enrolments
- increase in the number and diversity of courses
- increased funding and income
- establishment of buildings
- increased participation in programs and 'other activities in the house'

- the degree of participation in networks which 'have enhanced their competitive advantage over agencies which are not involved, which is ultimately the best measure of the success of a marketing strategy' (ACFEB 1998a, p. 46–7)

Indicative of these outcomes are Victorian data which show that between 1991 and 1997 community-based providers and the Council for Adult Education (CAE) generated:

- a 22 per cent increase in enrolments (to 308 000) and a 104 per cent increase in student hours (to over 9.4 million)
- a 42 per cent increase (to $33.6 million) in government funds from all sources

In addition, 'funded access and vocational activity' produced nearly 110 000 enrolments and 4.4 million contact hours. There was also an increase of almost 20 per cent of centres participating in data collection.

Another companion paper 'Lifelong learning and ACE' reports that stakeholders point with some pride to the increase in labour market and vocationally oriented programs being offered, and to the 180 ACE providers (Australia-wide) which have become registered to provide a range of VET accredited courses.

It is apparent that the smaller, community-based organisations generally concentrate more upon development outcomes for the individual based upon 'fundamental principles and values . . . about life-long learning, about community development, about democratic participation, about racial diversity and cultural harmony' (ACFEB 1998a, p. 9). They are committed to learning which is 'holistic and manifested in social action and community development' (AAACE 1991, p. 20). Much of the learning is 'informal, incidental, experiential and communal' and skills are 'multi-faceted and transferable' (AAACE 1991, p. 20).

For instance, in the 1995 report *Opening doors* (Ducie 1995), Learning Centre Link (WA) published information believed to substantiate the 'valuable and necessary service' which centres provide to individuals, and thence to the community. This information is consistent with, and builds upon findings reported in *Community learning: The outcomes report* (Kimberley 1986) and *Community learning: A public investment* (Benson et al. 1984). While these studies are somewhat dated and do not fall strictly within the scope of this paper, they do provide an historical perspective to this and other aspects of community-based provision identified here.

Ducie cites as typical of the response given by former participants, that involvement had, for example, assisted them to grow in confidence and self-assurance—they had come to appreciate their abilities, they had gained the opportunity for self-empowerment and enhanced self-esteem and their horizons had been broadened. It is further claimed that participants gained increased awareness of local issues, enhanced psychological wellbeing, and management, communication and 'course-related' skills.

It is probable that the Learning Centre Link study replicates outcomes found elsewhere and to some extent corroboration can be found in the 1998 paper, *Speaking back* (ACFEB 1998a, pp. 25–27).

A common goal

It is well recognised that the sector is facing new challenges in the developing education environment, an environment which is largely alien to the philosophy and principles of ACE provision.

Notwithstanding the debates arising from the current education and training environment and apparent philosophical differences, community-based ACE organisations, large and small, do share a deep concern for the needs (including educational needs) of their communities (as they see them) and of individual learners, and for the values inherent in the

provision of high-quality lifelong education. While their interpretation of 'community benefit' may differ and lead them to pursue different priorities, there is a strong commitment to community service, individual development and community enhancement.

ACE and VET have complementary roles in addressing the lifelong learning needs and aspirations of Australians. This is, in fact, recognised by ANTA in its 1998–2003 strategy in which it states that 'people will have the option to . . . undertake vocational education and training in community-based organisations' (ANTA n.d., p. 7) and yet the 'vocational role [of community-based organisations] will not diminish their important contribution to self development and general education' (p. 10).

Clearly there are tensions between increased participation of ACE providers in the training market and the preservation of 'traditional ACE values' which have led to a wide variety of opinions within the sector. While some argue for ACE to return to its original roots, others advocate a closer examination of the current position and developing trends in order to identify the range of options available in the contemporary environment. To this end research into the benefits, costs and difficulties experienced by ACE sector organisations moving into the new environment of increasing vocational provision may be warranted. Such research would assist appropriate State and Territory authorities to encourage and support ACE providers to develop their educational provision in the interests of both individual learners and communities.

The challenge

A challenge remains to achieve substantial recognition of the value of traditional ACE outcomes among policy and decision-makers, even in those States and Territories where, by virtue of legislative and structural support, the sector is an accepted part of the education environment.

Governments have recognised and acknowledged the economic value of ACE to the community. (This issue is also addressed in the companion paper 'Who uses ACE: Future demand', chapter 2 of this publication.) However, given an environment where the value of educational and personal development outcomes is measured in terms of their economic value, the challenge for the taskforce is to develop comparative quantitative information on the economic value of ACE.

In 1986 Kimberley noted that: 'There has been no previous attempt to document any of the outcomes of community-based provision of education' (Kimberley 1986, p. 8). These outcomes have now been well documented and accepted. This paper argues that there is now a need to quantify the value of those outcomes.

Some aspects of the ACE sector can be readily quantified, such as establishing the deprival or replacement value of volunteer effort. It will be necessary, however, to research and quantify benefits generally considered as intangible. While much of this information will not necessarily reflect increased productivity or wealth generation, it will indicate the extent to which government outlays in other areas, such as health or community support, are reduced by virtue of ACE activity.

Whyte and Crombie (1995) postulate that, as urban decay, pollution, violence and health become more 'intractable' problems, and absorb more and more public funds, 'so the need increases for a well-informed, active citizenry'. It is expected that governments will respond favourably to information which indicates the extent to which increased investment in ACE provision (through both infrastructure support and programs) will pay a dividend in the form not only community cohesion, but also through reductions of expenditure across government programs.

State and Territory structures

The 1997 Crowley report (Crowley 1997, p. 79) noted that 'the ACE landscape . . . has been significantly and permanently altered [since 1991] by the changes and developments in national policies and structural arrangements' and that while all States had adopted the 'vocational education and training agenda', there remain 'striking differences' in the degree to which ACE has been integrated into policy and practice. However, there have been and continue to be developments in the States and Territories that impinge upon that landscape.

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT *Vocational Education and Training Act 1995* vests responsibility for adult and community education in the ACT Vocational Education Training Authority (VETA) which, while it reflects 'a recognition that vocational education and training has both a "training orientation and a community orientation" ' (Crowley 1997, pp. 101–102), does not impose a VET bias on ACE provision.

The ACE Advisory Council has been established as a standing committee of the VETA Board to advise the Minister, through the VETA, on matters pertaining to the ACE sector. Membership of the Council is drawn representatively from the ACE sector.

The Council has published a policy on ACE, endorsed by the ACT Government, which closely reflects the philosophy, objectives and goals of the national policy. A strategic plan for the period 1997–2000 has been developed to facilitate implementation of the policy.

A mapping exercise is being undertaken to more clearly identify the approximately 200 ACE providers in the ACT, the vast majority of which are community-owned and managed.

Community-based providers have access, through an annual submission-based funding process, to grants for the provision of ACE programs and providers may also seek VET funds available through the competitive market.

New South Wales

ACE in New South Wales is Adult and Community Education.

The *Board of Adult and Community Education Act 1990* (s. 7) provides for a board (BACE) which is located within the Department of Training and Education Coordination and is supported by the ACE Services Unit.

The board supports the main ACE providers by:

- allocating recurrent and specific funds
- representing the interests of the sector
- developing and implementing initiatives, either independently or in conjunction with other ACE sector representatives
- undertaking research and development
- supporting regional councils

There are nine regional councils which promote, support and co-ordinate, the provision of ACE across the State. Such provision is focussed on 'education and training provided by independent, non-government, non-profit, community-owned and managed organisations'. These providers must 'have the provision of adult education explicitly stated in their charter and [have] the capacity to respond to the varied educational needs of the community' (NSW BACE 1996b).

There are more than 70 major providers and some smaller organisations which receive grants through the board, but who are largely self-funding. These organisations include evening and community colleges (24), workers' educational associations (three) and community adult education centres (45), servicing 'hundreds of local outlets'. The Crowley report notes (1997, p. 84) that: 'A distinctive feature of the ACE sector in NSW is that most of the organisations are large with professional infrastructure supporting them'.

The board and the TAFE Commission are required to prepare a joint annual strategic plan for the sector ensuring the comprehensive provision of adult education and training for adults throughout NSW, providing complementary services and allowing each sector to concentrate on what it does best.

Northern Territory

At the time of the Crowley report (1997, pp. 100–101) no formal infrastructure serving the ACE sector existed in the Northern Territory. Co-ordination was being undertaken through the NT Employment and Training Authority.

The Senate committee noted that 'mapping of the ACE sector' in the Northern Territory which includes approximately 100 VET providers of which 'a number' are community-based, would commence in 1997.

A particular challenge for ACE in the Northern Territory context is the provision of adult education opportunities to remote Aboriginal communities. The committee was encouraged to note that participation rates in such communities is increasing.

Queensland

The Crowley Committee reported that: 'The ACE sector, in Queensland, is largely undeveloped with no formal infrastructure serving the interests of the sector as a whole. Responsibility for the ACE sector lies with the Department of Employment, Vocational Education, Training and Industrial Relations, the focus of which is "unambiguously on the training market" ' (Crowley 1997, p. 95).

Since publication of this report a proposal has been developed for the establishment of an Adult Community Education Council, in response to the national policy objective to 'maintain or establish appropriate government mechanisms whose charters specifically include the support and promotion of ACE provisions'.

The Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission (VETEC) of Queensland has determined that such a council should have a separate identity and sit outside the VETEC structure. Funding was set aside in 1996–97 for the establishment of the Council.

The proposal provides that initially the ACE Council would advise the State Government through the Department of Training and Industrial Relations but envisages that in time the Council would operate independently of government.

The vast majority of what is defined as ACE in Queensland is currently delivered through the TAFE system. While there are some 250 self-identified community ACE providers there is no discrete community-based sector as such. These organisations receive some program funding from VETEC on the basis that ACE is a 'feeder' to the VET sector and that community providers are potential VET providers.

South Australia

The Adult and Community Education Council (ACEC) was established under the *Vocational Education and Training (VEET) Act 1994* in recognition of the role and contribution of the adult education sector, 'both as a community service and as a contributor to vocational skill formation' (Crowley 1997, p. 91).

In 1994 the South Australian Department of Employment, Training and Further Education established an Adult Community Education Unit to serve ACEC. The unit is also charged with responsibility for the development and administration of a statewide ACE system (which includes TAFE institutes) consistent with the objectives of the national policy on adult community education. The objectives of the policy have been adopted by the Council as the basis for 'strategic directions for the development of adult community education in South Australia' (VEET Board 1998, p. 26).

The unit assists the ACEC in strategic planning and in 1997, the priority was 'the provision of lifelong learning opportunities by reaching clients of greatest need'.

The unit also provides management and administrative advice and support to providers to assist their meeting performance and accountability obligations. The unit supports community-based ACE providers, not only through the provision of program funds, negotiated around indicative performance indicators, but also through the provision of material assistance to the community in the identification of needs and the achievement of outcomes.

There are approximately 120 community providers, of which 90 are community centres or neighbourhood houses. The sector also includes the Workers' Educational Association, TAFE institutes, the University of the Third Age, schools, universities, and other community groups.

The ACEC allocates State and Commonwealth government funds for provision of ACEC priorities, to 'community-based organisations wanting to provide education and training programs for community members who are not ready or suited to more formal avenues of education.' Organisations in receipt of funds are 'required to provide an educational program determined by community need which is cost effective and accountable for its outcomes to both the community and the government' (ACEC 1998, p. 9).

While an element of ACEC's strategy is to strengthen the role of ACE in the VET sector, currently only a limited number of community-based providers formally deliver accredited VET programs and, as yet, none of these receive ANTA funding.

Tasmania

Recent developments in Tasmania have resulted in the establishment of the ACE Advisory Committee with responsibility to provide advice on ACE matters to the Tasmanian State Training Authority (TASTA). The committee includes representatives from the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses, the University of the Third Age, the School for Seniors and from equity group stakeholders.

The objective of the committee is to maximise the level and quality of ACE provision through specialised advice to TASTA. The Office of Vocational Education and Training, which is a division of the Department of Education, Training, Community and Cultural Development, has the responsibility to brief the minister on national and State ACE issues.

While the major provision of ACE in Tasmania is undertaken through the Institute of Adult Education and Community Services, adult education is also provided through neighbourhood houses, migrant resource centres, private providers and (particularly non-government) schools.

There are 30 neighbourhood houses in Tasmania providing a broad range of community services, including adult community education. They receive small amounts of government funds for the delivery of specific ACE courses; however, most are provided on a minimal fee-for-service basis. As is the case in other States and Territories, community members are attracted to these centres because of the multiple focus of the services and the supportive nature of their environment.

Victoria

ACE in Victoria is, by definition, community-owned and managed adult education provision and is supported by the most comprehensive legislative and structural framework of all the States and Territories. Victoria has a comprehensive and formal TAFE system.

Through its 1991 Act the Victorian Government provided for ' . . funding for community-based co-ordination infrastructure, program support and specific programs such as literacy and basic education'. The high status afforded ACE in Victoria is evidenced by the supporting legislative and structural framework. Key components of the structure are:

- the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB), comprising 16 members, which has responsibility for planning, policy development, allocation of government funding and advising the Minister on matters relating to ACE
- the Adult, Community and Further Education Division (ACFED) of the Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE), which performs planning and review functions, manages program support, provides advice on policy and research priorities and co-ordinates development of policy with a statewide focus
- nine regional councils, each comprising 12 voluntary members, with responsibility to develop regional plans and policies, and promote, support, resource and evaluate adult education provision.

Regional councils of ACFE contribute to statewide planning and policy development and receive resources based upon annual performance agreements which include provision for measurement of qualitative educational outcomes and quantitative measures, such as student hour costs and participation rates.

ACFEB works closely with the State Training Board (which has responsibility for the provision of adult, community and further education in TAFE colleges/institutes) planning adult, community and further education across the State. A three-year plan for ACFE provision is produced jointly by ACFEB and the State Training Board.

ACFEB funds educational programs offered by community-based providers and the (Council for Adult Education (CAE), which together comprise the 'ACE sector' (the CAE's statutory status notwithstanding).

There are 'more than 550 [eligible for funding, with 468 registered] community-based providers, which are non-profit organisations, managed by independent, autonomous local committees of management', including neighbourhood houses, learning centres, and various community groups receiving government funding to undertake adult education activities (ACFEB 1997a, p. 10). This has included State recurrent funds (of which approximately 15 per cent goes towards general support for adult education in the community which may include infrastructure and other non-program expenditure) and Commonwealth growth funds available for accredited and non-accredited vocational education and training through the ANTA agreement (ACFEB 1997c, p. 1).

Western Australia

ACE programs are delivered through TAFE colleges, senior colleges, universities and a network of neighbourhood houses and learning centres. The latter comprises the community-based sector, which in 1997 included 80 neighbourhood houses and community learning centres.

The WA Government allocates some funding to community providers, particularly through a grant to Learning Centre Link, the peak body for the neighbourhood house and learning centre sector.

Although the Crowley Committee (1997) received advice that a comprehensive study of ACE providers is to be undertaken, the sole link between the ACE sector and the

government on matters of policy is through the WA Department of Training ACE Advisory Committee.

To date the main focus of the advisory committee has been on the provision of ACE through the VET system and the contribution that ACE can make to VET outcomes.

This is a situation viewed by most practitioner bodies to be in need of further development because:

- There is little if any provision for the ACE sector to have an identity other than in terms of its capacity to contribute to the VET sector.
- There is little, or no formal recognition of the sector as a viable and significant contributor to education.
- The lack of any form of co-ordinated approach to ACE provision means that there are both omissions and duplications in the provision of adult education to the community.

Peak bodies have approached the government with a view to establishing a mechanism whereby ACE provision can be planned and co-ordinated. Such co-ordination is seen to be vital in keeping the various players in the ACE sector informed of each other's activities and also assisting in maximising the value gained from the use of available resources. A further significant objective of this approach is to provide the sector with a mechanism for direct access to the minister.

Where provision is made within the VET system for adult community education it is done through the TAFE colleges.

The issues

Despite perceived improvements, clearly there are significant incongruities between national policy aspirations of systematic and structural support in each State, and allocation of funding and resources based on clear and consistent principles, and the States' responses to those policy aspirations.

As noted by Schofield et al. (1996, p. A1.5):

> *. . . despite the rhetoric about lifelong learning, in many States and Territories, General Adult Education does not receive the policy or financial recognition that its contribution to the goal of lifelong learning warrants. . . . there are sound arguments for providing some funds by way of infrastructure or management support to assist programs to be organised and delivered.*

It is also clear, particularly given the nature of the sector, structuring cannot be imposed. Governments are, however, in a strong position to influence the speed, nature and extent of development in structural arrangements for the sector within their jurisdiction. This influence will be crucial to the continuation and development of ACE. The sector is noted for its wide use of consultation and each State is strongly independent. However, implementation of the national policy could be progressed by all governments making a concerted effort to address the issue and promoting debate within their jurisdiction on the best model for preserving and fostering adult education provision, including through the community-based sector.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of ACE provision by State and Territory

State	Legislation/admin	Funding	Scope
ACT	ACT Vocational Education Training Authority (VETA) established by 1995 legislation ACE Advisory Council is a committee of VETA Board	Submission-based funding VET funds through competitive market	Responsibility for adult and community education Training and community orientation No VET bias in ACE provision
NSW	Board of Adult and Community Education established by 1990 legislation BACE located within Dept of Training and Education Coordination Nine regional councils across State co-ordinating ACE provision	Providers receive some funds from BACE but are largely self-funding	Education and training provided by independent, non-government, non-profit, community-owned and managed organisations Includes evening community colleges, WEAs, community adult education centres
NT	No formal infrastructure		Includes adult education to Aboriginal communities
Qld	No formal infrastructure Responsibility for sector lies with Dept of Employment, Vocational Education, Training and Industrial Relations Proposal for establishment of Adult Community Education Council independent of Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission (Qld)	Program funding from VETEC	ACE delivered through TAFE system
SA	Adult and Community Education Council (ACEC) established by 1994 legislation Adult and Community Education Unit of DETAFE services ACEC	ACEC allocates State and Commonwealth funds to community-based organisations	Sector includes community centres, WEA, TAFE institutes, U3A universities and community groups
Tas	ACE Advisory Committee provides specialist advice on ACE to Tasmanian State Training Authority Office of VET briefs minister on national and State ACE issues TAFE Tasmania is a major provider of adult education programs	Community organisations receive some government funds for specific ACE courses Interest courses operate on minimal fee-for-service basis TAFE Tasmania receives some fees for adult education programs Provision purchased from TAFE Tasmania by Office of VET	ACE conducted through Institute of Education and Community Services, neighbourhood houses, migrant resource centres and private providers
Vic	A comprehensive ACE structure 1991 legislation established Adult, Community and Further Education Board, responsible for planning and policy, allocation of funding, provision of ministerial advice Adult, Community and Further Education Division of Office of Training and Further Education responsible for planning and reviews, program support, co-ordinates statewide policy Nine regional councils responsible for regional policy and planning and evaluation of adult education provision	ACFEB funds educational programs offered by community providers and the CAE 15% of State recurrent funds to support adult education in community Commonwealth growth funds for accredited and non-accredited VET	More than 550 community-based non-profit providers including neighbourhood houses, community centres and groups
WA	Department of Training ACE Advisory Committee provides link between ACE sector and government No formal recognition of sector	Some government funding to community providers, mainly through Learning Link	ACE programs mainly delivered through TAFE colleges Also through senior college, universities, neighbourhood houses and learning centres

In its response to *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997), the Commonwealth Government's adoption of a leadership role in this area has begun. In this report the government gives an '. . . unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and the promotion of a learning society'. It further makes a commitment to imbuing '. . . its education policies and associated funding mechanisms with the values and principles of lifelong learning for all Australians' (DEETYA 1998, p. 4). It is to be hoped that this commitment will not only apply to narrow vocational outcomes. Individual development (through learning and participation) and the positive effect that such development has on community development should not be underestimated or overlooked.

Bradbery, Fletcher and Molloy (1998), in discussing a diagnostic tool for community wellbeing, acknowledge that economic and ecological/environmental factors are significant but argue that less tangible factors must be taken into account.

They use the term 'interconnectedness', an expression of 'unity or wholeness' as a measure of community wellbeing and suggest that a high state of interconnectedness would manifest itself through a number of indicators including community involvement, creativity, physical and mental health, cultural awareness and meaningful employment.

Negative community outcomes such as crime rates, morbidity indices, suicide rates, public health expenditure, and family breakdown are identified by Bradbery, Fletcher and Molloy as indicators, which when reduced, represent an improvement in community wellbeing, resulting in savings to public expenditure in a variety of ways.

These indicators have been taken into account in the proposal for development of a more quantitative approach to valuing community development and the contribution made by ACE. They should also be of direct relevance to considerations by the Commonwealth Government and State governments on the value that can be gained from investment in community improvement and maintenance in comparison to the cost of 'repair'. There certainly would be value in researching and quantifying the extent to which ACE has the capacity to contribute, through individual education and community development, to improvement in these negative indices.

In light of the reduction in services and the removal of community foci from, in particular, rural settings, State governments should be aware of the value to continued community wellbeing which is fostered through adult education activities. The local centre has the capacity to provide a focus for community activity and interaction, and investment in the continuation and development of such centres would yield valuable returns for State governments in regard to, in particular, social cohesion in rural areas.

The Victorian ACFE Board, for example, expresses the view that 'The adult community education sector may provide an example of best practice in rural policy and a model for other areas of government effort' as the 'ACFE Board and its regional councils are expressive of a powerful relationship between government and the community'.

The Board believes that ACE should be seen as more than a provider of educational opportunity in that:

> *In simple terms ACE adds to the value of community life, generates purpose and belonging, builds a sense of connectedness which strengthens community resilience and confidence to participate in rapid State, national and global change. For a sector with limited resources ACE has an impact in almost every area of community life.*
> (ACFEB 1998c)

Adult education in general, and ACE in particular, must find and establish a place in the changing national education system worthy of its aims, ideals and recognised benefits.

There is value for all governments in promoting the benefits of lifelong learning through community adult education as well as fostering greater provision and encouraging wider

participation, not only in terms of general economic development but also in the context of improved community cohesion, health and development.

States must be encouraged by the Commonwealth to implement national policy in this area with the Commonwealth Government continuing to demonstrate leadership by becoming more closely involved in promoting adequate general adult education opportunities for the community, through comprehensive and innovative funding initiatives. In this way, a truly balanced and coherent educational sector will be born which anticipates the future with a well-prepared, well-educated and intelligent community of lifelong learners.

5 Widening participation in ACE

Executive summary

The purpose of this discussion paper is to explore the issues associated with the widening participation in ACE for those groups currently under-represented and to propose strategies that will assist with the development of related policies.

Adult education is enjoying a new level of attention and is being recognised as possessing characteristics that align with the concept of lifelong learning. This has led the ACE sector to be identified as having an important role to play in transforming Australia in to a learning society.

This resurgence in interest in adult education has been made apparent by increased participation, a broadened program base and a dramatic increase in the number of publications and research reports on issues associated with ACE.

ACE is increasingly acknowledged as being of value not only to the individual learner, but also to the community, the economy and to the government, the latter in the context of Australia as a 'learning society'.

Participation and non-participation

Participants in adult education are typically characterised by possessing higher levels of income, schooling, occupation, and confidence as well as displaying well-developed social relationships, while non-participants are typically characterised as having low incomes, low levels of language and communication skills and low levels of confidence.

UK research suggests that in the absence of positive intervention, non-participation in adult education tends to be passed on from generation to generation. Among the barriers to participation are fear of failure, perceived irrelevance of courses, geographic isolation, inadequate information and inappropriate learning support mechanisms.

Adult education and the OECD

OECD data show that in terms of the level of education reached, Australia's adult population is trailing that of other OECD countries. The recent OECD conference 'How Adults Learn' (OECD 1998a) identified motivation, capacity and access as the three crucial prerequisites for participation in adult education.

On the issue of older adults, the conference noted that as life expectancy rises, older adults are becoming a larger and increasing proportion of the population and that this group is significantly less well education than younger adults.

The conference warns that non-participation by older adults will lead to social obsolescence and reclusiveness. Findings from the conference also refer to recent studies in gerontology which make a number of important observations on the mental capacity and learning abilities of adult learners.

Widening participation

By upholding the principles that underpin ACE; that is, by being more responsive, flexible, accessible, community-oriented and welcoming, providers will go a long way to addressing the barriers to participation.

In relation to widening participation, the national policy on ACE shows the way by providing a vision, goals and a set of objectives presented in outcome terms.

Establishing collaborative arrangements with other sectors/providers, at systems level, is perceived as an effective strategy both for establishing pathways as well as providing access to a broad range of facilities and equipment.

Targeting funding (including the judicious application of fee concessions) at groups from disadvantaged sections of the population is considered to have the greatest potential for widening participation in ACE.

The introduction of the much-discussed learning entitlements may be the most effective way of widening participation, particularly if targeted at members of non-participating groups. However, as becoming a learning society implies universal participation, then the learning entitlements should ideally be applied universally.

Impact of information technology

Access by learners to quality, interactive and user-friendly global information networks will increasingly enable them to undertake an ever-increasing number of high-quality international programs/courses. By overcoming the barriers of geographic and/or institutional isolation and by reducing costs, IT will play a pivotal role in increasing access by non-participants thereby helping to transform Australia into a learning society.

In order to play a meaningful role in this new IT Environment, ACE providers will need to change the way they operate.

Providers will also need to consider filling market gaps, to participate in courseware development and to offer learning environments which give access to the technology while the same time providing a range of support services.

The ACE sector also has an important role to play in educating members of the general community to become IT-literate, thus ensuring that they are not excluded from participating in civic and democratic society.

ACE a bridge to VET

The move by an increasing number of ACE providers to broaden the range of their programs by offering accredited courses has resulted in increased participation. The move not only addresses the concern about the relevance of ACE courses, but also helps to establish additional entry points, and in some rural locations offers the only entry points.

New and extended role for ACE

Removing barriers is only one way to widen participation. Other ways include identifying new market niches associated with newly emerging industries and with changes to society.

Topics for further research

The discussion paper concludes by suggesting a number of topics for consideration for further research. Topics were prompted by both the literature and advice from the stakeholders consulted. They include study time entitlements, planning at state level, using the research, fee concessions and systemic barriers to participation.

Introduction

New era for ACE

There is a growing realisation that, in today's complex world, countries will be significantly disadvantaged by not having a skilled, creative, knowledgeable and socially functional adult population.

Recent times have seen a resurgence in adult education both within Australia and internationally, a resurgence founded largely on this realisation. Influential international bodies such as UNESCO and the OECD consider lifelong learning to be the key to achieving a peaceful, economically and environmentally sustainable world community.

In Australia, Commonwealth support for ACE dates back to the Senate Committee report *Come in Cinderella* (Aulich 1991). This report was instrumental in ACE becoming widely recognised within educational circles and government as 'a fourth sector of education and training, structurally and operationally distinct from the schools, universities and VET sectors, yet linked to them via learning pathways' (Crowley 1997, p. 13).

Since the publication of that first significant report the first national ACE policy has been developed (in 1993, revised 1997) and a national ACE Taskforce of MCEETYA has been established. In 1997 the report of a second Senate Committee inquiry, *Beyond Cinderella* (Crowley 1997) was released. Building on the 1991 report, *Beyond Cinderella* indicated a strong commitment from the Commonwealth Government, 'to the concept of lifelong learning and the promotion of a learning society' (DEETYA 1998, p. 4). As part of that commitment the government agreed to review its policies and funding mechanisms to ensure that 'they embodied the principles of lifelong learning for all Australians' (DEETYA 1998, p. 4).

In the context of tangible outcomes, a renewed interest in ACE can be measured according to three indicators: first, through a significant increase in the level of participation. Crowley (1997, p. 15) estimates, on the evidence available, that participation in ACE has risen from 800 000 in 1991 to around one million in 1997.

Second, the range and level of programs offered by ACE has been broadened. While the value of the traditional ACE programs, (that is, general adult education and adult basic education) has been confirmed, there has been a growing recognition that the ACE sector can also offer, where appropriate, accredited vocational courses delivered in a community setting.

Finally, a revival of interest in ACE is evidenced by a significant increase in research at all levels, examining such areas as organisational structures, delivery systems, participation, lifelong learning and community involvement.

A national framework: Unity in diversity

In light of the ongoing changes to the context in which ACE is operating, MCEETYA endorsed a national ACE policy in 1997 which charges the sector with the challenging task of 'working alongside the other education sectors in building a learning society' (MCEETYA 1997, p. 6). Moreover, it advocates a broader role for ACE, one which encompasses the principles of economic advancement, social inclusiveness and personal development.

While providing the States with a much-needed framework within which to develop their strategic plans, the national policy is sensitive to the issue of State–Commonwealth relations. It clearly recognises the considerable diversity in ACE settings which exists around the nation and has framed its policies to accommodate these differences.

A robust sector based on common values and principles

One approach to widening participation in adult education is to look at the barriers perceived as blocking participation by certain groups and to find strategies to remove, or at least reduce, those barriers. Another way is to broaden the role of the ACE sector by offering programs currently considered the province of other sectors—universities, community and senior colleges and TAFE institutes—and by developing programs that will cater to the new market niches associated with emerging industries and rapid social change.

While this paper will deal with these strategies in detail, it is important to emphasise that the ability of the sector to contribute to the national goal of 'transforming Australia into a learning society' requires a robust ACE sector. That is to say, a sector in which providers, in partnership with governments, have made a commitment to a common vision which in turn is based on the values and principles of lifelong learning.

For a description of 'lifelong learning' see the section 'What is lifelong learning?' in chapter 3, companion paper 'Lifelong learning and ACE'.

The value of ACE

The individual

It is acknowledged that the adult education component of the lifelong learning experience benefits 25 to 30 per cent of Australians who choose to participate in this activity, a choice made in order to acquire additional skills, to improve work opportunities, to enhance their role within the community and to further their own personal wellbeing.

The community

The word 'community' in the acronym ACE reflects the commitment by agencies to adding value to communities, whether geographic or ethnic, or simply communities of interest. In their publicly stated objectives, these agencies articulate a commitment to developing the capacity of communities to meet the educational and personal development needs of their members. They also stress the need to 'enhance positive community values and community responsibility, and promote the autonomy of communities' (ACFEB 1998b, p. 2). Moreover, use of the term 'community' acknowledges a provision which is characterised by being responsive to community needs, accessible to all, learner-centered in its approach, and which involves the community/s in the management of the process.

ACE can be said to add value to a community through its ability to increase the collective knowledge, skills and attributes of individual members. The value of ACE to the community is dealt with in greater depth in the companion paper 'Community in ACE', chapter 4.

The economy

Given the philosophy underpinning ACE and its role in implementing lifelong learning, it would be reasonable to assume that governments would attest to the value of ACE to the economy. Workers who are literate and numerate, who are competent communicators, who possess good people and team skills, and who are creative problem-solvers, would in all probability, be considered to be more productive and hence of greater value to an organisation than workers who have not acquired those attributes.

As a sector, ACE is increasingly working with industry in the workplace to meet the adult basic education needs such as literacy and numeracy of employees.

Government/s

It goes without saying that governments value highly citizens who are skilled and knowledgeable, who understand economic, social and cultural issues and who, as a result, are able to contribute to the establishment of a cohesive and culturally diverse and economically successful society. Governments are aware that the health of a participative, democratic society is dependent on a well-developed learning culture.

Non-participation: What the literature tells us

Studies into participation in ACE

One of the ways in which the renewed support for adult education has been made apparent, both here and abroad, is through the increase in literature on adult education, including that relating to participation.

The issue of increasing participation in lifelong learning, a key goal for ACE, is specifically covered in the 1997 national ACE policy, as well as in the Crowley report, *Beyond Cinderella*, (Crowley 1997) and the 1997 UK White Paper *Learning for the twenty-first century* chaired by RH Fryer (1997).

This paper will assess what the reports have to say in regard to:

- groups that are under-represented in post-school education
- the characteristics of these groups
- the barriers to participation
- the strategies (including further research) for addressing the barriers/obstacles

The UK experience: Background to the Australian context

In 1997 the British government commissioned two reports whose findings have profoundly affected the spread of lifelong learning in that country. The first report, *Learning for the twenty-first century* was produced by the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, and chaired by RH Fryer. The group was charged with advising the government on '. . . matters concerning adult learning with particular reference to extending the inclusion in lifelong and work-based learning to those groups and individuals whose increased participation will contribute to improvements in employability, regeneration, capacity building, economic efficiency, social cohesion, independent living and citizenship generally' (Fryer 1997, p. 92).

The second report, *Learning works: Widening participation in further education*, produced by a committee of the Further Education Council and chaired by H Kennedy (1997), sets out an agenda for change aimed at increasing access to post-sixteen learning.

The objectives set out in the British reports largely coincide with those contained in the 1997 Australian national ACE policy. The objectives referred to in this policy also refer to 'Social cohesion, cultural awareness, income generation, civic education, employment outcomes, personal outcomes, pathways to other sectors and government public education' (objectives 4, 5 & 6).

Limitations of data

Where necessary, the paper will refer to data on participation in adult education as published by the AAACE (1995), the NCVER (1998b) and the OECD (1998a). In doing so the inherent limitations of that data will be taken into account. These limitations are dealt with in more detail in the companion paper, 'Who uses ACE: Future demand' (chapter 2). In

essence they originate in the different perceptions about what constitutes ACE activity and about who should be included as an ACE provider.

Who is participating?

Before focusing on who is not participating, it is useful to briefly consider the profile of those who are. Both Bennink and Blackwell (1995b) and Alt and Beatty (1996) provide profiles of the typical ACE learner. Given that their findings are based on the same data (compiled by McIntyre et al. 1995) and drawn from the ABS (1995), it is not surprising that their respective descriptions of the adult participants in ACE are similar, for example:

- Seventy-nine per cent of participants were female.
- People aged 35 to 54 made up almost half the participants while those over 55 made up another quarter.
- Thirty-nine per cent were parents in two parent households. Twenty-nine per cent were with a partner and without children, 11 per cent lived alone and seven per cent were sole parents.
- About half of the respondents had a post-school qualification.
- Forty-seven per cent were employed either full-time or part-time and 42 per cent were not in the labour force (those not employed and not seeking work); nine per cent were unemployed (Alt & Beatty 1996, p. 16).

Alt and Beatty also draw on other data to show the results to be consistent with international findings which indicate that the participants tend to be characterised by the following attributes:

- good material circumstances (higher income and occupational levels)
- greater mobility (ability to anticipate and instigate social change)
- cultural familiarity (higher levels of schooling and extended social relationships) (Alt & Beatty 1996, p. 17)

Who is not participating?

There is no shortage of data indicating the basis on which non-participants in ACE have been classified as belonging to one or more identifiable groups within the population. Lists of non-participating groups can be found in the national ACE policy (MCEETYA 1997, p. 15) as well as in the work of Alt and Beatty (1996, p. 19). While these writers caution against generalising about such groupings, they nevertheless see them as beneficial when marketing ACE activities. Non-participating groups include:

- people with limited and/or unhappy education experiences
- people on low incomes
- some ethnic groups
- low-skilled manual workers
- people living in institutions or who are geographically isolated
- people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties
- older people
- unemployed people

Research commissioned in the United Kingdom found non-participation to be self-perpetuating; that is, in the absence of intervention, non-participation tended to be passed on from generation to generation. There is no reason to believe that the Australian situation is different.

Barriers to participation

Researchers Bennink and Blackwell (1995) and Alt and Beatty (1996) identified the following barriers to participation:

- low levels of confidence or self-esteem leading to a fear of failure (often related to poor previous education experiences)
- a perception that learning is irrelevant and without value
- geographic isolation, lack of time, money and/or transport (sometimes used as face-saving devices to cover personal or psychological reasons)
- inappropriateness of programs offered, in terms of content, location and/or level of associated support
- a negative perception of ACE providers. The perception might relate to the profile of the learners they attract and/or the methodologies they use.

Fryer (1997), in the UK report, identifies additional barriers to participation associated with the organisational arrangements of adult education at systems level. In particular his report refers to such features as:

- the complex and bureaucratic approach to enrolments
- the confusing and narrow range of qualifications
- the inadequate and insufficiently available information, guidance and counselling
- the lack of clear educational pathways
- the confusing multiplicity of acronyms and the use of jargon

Fryer believes these barriers to be unnecessary and stresses the significance of their impact on participation. He notes that when 'seen from the point of view of those potential learners we seek to motivate, the situation can easily appear as confusing, intimidating and clear confirmation that education is for other people who appear able to find their way through the maze' (Fryer 1997, p. 21).

In Australia the issue of systemic barriers to participation has not received much attention. It would be useful to undertake research to determine the relevance of these issues to the Australian context.

An additional barrier referred to by Fryer is the 'stand-off' between various providers, each less concerned with the interests of the learner than with protecting their own turf. Such an observation may apply to the Australian experience. During the consultations undertaken it appeared that there was scope for establishing more effective collaborative arrangements between providers of ACE as well as between providers in other education sectors at both State and National levels. Creating those linkages and developing collaboration will continue to be a challenge for the ACE sector.

The OECD experience

At the recent OECD conference 'How adults learn' (OECD 1998a), data were presented which showed a wide discrepancy between OECD countries in terms of the number of adults who had completed upper secondary education. Australia, with a non-completion rate of 38 per cent, was one of the three lowest-ranking countries, well behind Germany 11 per cent, United States 12 per cent, Sweden 13 per cent and the United Kingdom 14 per cent (OECD 1998a, p. 9).

The data also showed older adults to be twice as likely as young persons not to have completed upper secondary education. Moreover, it highlighted a correlation between

limited educational attainment, lower employment rates, lower earnings and higher risk of unemployment. For example, in Australia the level of unemployment for 25–64-year-olds with education below upper secondary was found to be 8.5 per cent. This compares with 6.2 per cent for those with upper-secondary education, 5.1 per cent for those with tertiary education (non-university) and 3.3 per cent for those with higher education (university) (OECD 1998a, p. 11). These ratios are similar to those of other OECD countries shown in the survey.

In addition to identifying the nature and the magnitude of the problems associated with lower educational achievement, the conference addressed the issues surrounding the three groups of adults (immigrants, poorly qualified adults and older adults) whom the data had identified as having significantly lower levels of participation in any form of structured learning. In particular, those factors which *inhibit* participation and those which *encourage* participation in adult learning were examined to determine any commonalities between the three groups.

In regard to participation, the conference identified three common prerequisites that applied to people irrespective of their group, namely:

- *motivation*—It is inappropriate to assume that people have the will to participate. The desire to learn must be encouraged and nurtured.
- *capacity*—In order to be able to participate, adults require a minimum level of foundation knowledge and skills as well as the ability to learn.
- *access*—Given the will and capacity, adults also need access to an appropriate institutional structure which will provide good information, relevant courses, learner-centred methods, sound financial advice and learning support mechanisms.

Adults facing language barriers: Pathways out of disadvantage

The keynote paper on immigrants was delivered by Susan Allander of the Victorian Adult Multicultural Education Program (AMEP). In this paper she reported on the valuable role played by AMEP in providing migrants with the literacy and numeracy skills necessary to gain employment and to contribute effectively to Australian society. She also acknowledges the importance of the ACE sector in assisting immigrants, particularly those who require slower paced provision over a longer periods of time (Allander 1998, p. 12).

However, Allander cautions against the growing pressure on the ACE sector to contest funding for mainstream vocational education, resulting in its provision becoming more formalised and threatening its diversity. She also points to the impact of the trend to the 'user-pays' approach, particularly on the low-income groups for whom cost is a major barrier.

Older adults and participation

The year 1999 is designated as the 'International Year of Older People'. Thus it is timely to focus specifically on widening participation among older adults.

The OECD conference findings are an appropriate reference point for examining the Australian situation. OECD data show that as life expectancy rises, older adults are becoming a larger and, in most countries, a growing, proportion of the total population. In Australia, people 55 and over constitute 26 per cent of the total population (OECD Labour Force Survey 1996). The data further show this group to be significantly less well educated than young adults. To compound this difference the data also show a lower participation in adult education after 55. Furthermore, the rapid rate of technological and social change, as well as the accelerating growth of knowledge, leads to social obsolescence and symptoms such as ghettoisation, self-exclusion and reclusiveness for those who cannot cope with change (Allander 1998, p. 12).

In the conference paper 'How learning changes as adults age', G Dohmen (1998) of the German Institute for Adult Education explored the reasons why older people take much less advantage of organised adult education opportunities than do younger adults. These include:

- A large group of older adults (58 per cent) feels uncomfortable with the idea of attending school-like lessons, which cause unpleasant reminiscences.
- Older people have a great need for retaining their individuality; that is to say, they are less interested in rigid structures preferring a more individualised, learner-centred approach. They experience feelings of uncertainty about their ability to keep pace with the learner group and of appearing less capable.
- A number of external barriers such as lack of transport, bad weather, cold, poorly lit or uncomfortable learning environments also play a part.
- The use of learning materials that do not take account of the diminished ability to hear and see.

Dohmen challenges the common perception that lack of participation is a result of lack of interest in, or of ability to learn, noting that older people use different and in some cases, more self-determined forms of learning. He notes that 80 per cent of older adults learn regularly through reading, travelling, television programs and correspondence classes and that lifelong learning plays an important part in helping older adults remain mentally fit and healthy.

Dohmen refers to gerontological research which explains that the slower rate of learning observed in older adults results from the greater time required to compare and relate new information to the large volume and variety of previously stored experience.

Strategies for widening participation

Given that the barriers to participation identified within the Australian context are remarkably similar to those in other parts of the industrialised world, particularly the United Kingdom, it follows that similar strategies for overcoming the barriers can be adopted. The following proposals draw on the literature from the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as on the input from the stakeholders consulted during the course of this project.

The strengths of ACE

Several of the more experienced Australian ACE stakeholders pointed to the need to build on the inherent strengths of ACE. Many commented, that one of the most important strategies for addressing the barriers involved no more than implementing the fundamental principles underpinning lifelong learning and adult education. These are:

- *responsiveness*—the ability to respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to the education needs of individuals and communities. Responsiveness is dependent on providers being demand rather than supply-driven.
- *community focus*—a commitment to involving the community in deciding on the nature of the programs and in managing the process
- *flexibility*—a strong emphasis on involving the learner in deciding on what they learn, where and when that learning should occur and adopting innovative methodologies and delivery systems to enable this to happen
- *accessibility*—a commitment to the principles of access and equity, to understanding and respecting diversity, to removing barriers to entry, to recognising past experiences and to providing 'enhancement loops' where they are required

- *collaboration*—a commitment to collaboration and co-operation with other sectors/providers
- *welcoming*—a commitment to providing a friendly, non-threatening and supportive learning environment

The national policy

The national policy sees ACE as having 'an important role to play in transforming Australia into a learning society'. It is therefore not surprising that one of its key goals should make specific reference to 'responding to the needs of adults particularly those currently under-represented in ACE' (MCEETYA 1997, p. 10).

The national policy offers a vision as well as a set of goals and objectives and suggests strategies for achieving those objectives. The development and pursuit of those strategies is appropriately left to the States who have primary responsibility for the provision of ACE. The policy proposes a set of outcomes against which State agencies can measure their success in achieving wider participation.

Maintaining the health of the sector

Stakeholders acknowledged that the ACE sector needed to be more responsive to the induction and in-service development requirements of its staff. Improvement in this area was perceived as crucial since it is important to ensure that all practitioners, particularly new operators, acquire the skills necessary for effective adult education teaching, including those associated with IT.

In line with the expected impact of IT on both the delivery and administration of education, it will be necessary for ACE staff to acquire skills in this area, to enable them to exploit this technology as a tool for widening participation.

A number of stakeholders considered it important to work towards changing the make-up of the ACE workforce, so that it more closely approximates the cultural profile of the community it serves. This was regarded as an important strategy in helping to attract reluctant learners.

Establishing partnerships

Many stakeholders are committed to establishing closer links with other education sectors, and in particular with the VET sector. They see this as an important strategy for establishing learner pathways and for ensuring a more equitable approach to the use of public resources. They urge the development of cross-sectoral partnerships at the local level.

Role of governments

Targetted funding

An inability to meet the direct and indirect costs associated with participating in adult education programs has been identified as a major barrier for people belonging to one or more of the groups listed above. The strategic application of targeted funding is considered by many stakeholders to be a most effective tool in ensuring the participation of these groups. However, they stress that additional funds need to be targeted to ensure that they do not simply perpetuate educational inequalities associated with existing mechanisms which direct funding solely on the basis of student contact hours. This view is consistent with that expressed by the UK government in *The learning age*, which proposes using funding as a lever for change.

In committing itself to widening (not just increasing) participation in further education, the UK government has decided to inject some $200 million over 1999, targetted to attract an

additional 80 000 students from the disadvantaged sectors of the population. In the United Kingdom, however, the ACE and VET sectors have been amalgamated to become the further education sector. Thus the dollar allocation and the student participation target quoted above can not be directly related to the Australian situation. What it does show, however, is a very serious commitment by the UK government to widening participation.

Fee concessions

Applying fee concessions to user-pays programs is seen as one of the more effective ways of targeting funds, particularly once eligibility has been determined. By reimbursing providers on receipt of evidence of the enrolment of bona fide concession-card holders, funding agencies are assured that communities are funded in accordance with their socio-economic profile.

One State ACE agency currently operating with the assistance of State-funded fee concessions commented that the annual allocation fell well short of demand. As a result many eligible people were being denied concessions thus effectively blocking their access to general adult education. Furthermore, according to some agency sources it is common practice to use income from full fee-paying students to cross-subsidise concession students. While the practice of expecting one section of the student population to carry a burden that is considered to be a responsibility of government is perceived by some as unreasonable, others consider cross-subsidising to be an acceptable practice within an overall pricing policy. The complexities associated with concessions argue for further research into the question of use of fee concessions as an intervention strategy.

The Federal Government

While the States exercise a high degree of autonomy in relation to the structure, funding and policies of their respective ACE systems, the Commonwealth Government is acknowledged to have an important leadership role to play in widening participation. Most of the stakeholders consulted were of the view that on the issue of widening participation, the Commonwealth Government may wish to consider adopting the following strategies and thereby continue to provide a national leadership role:

- funding systems-wide initiatives, such as publishing quality information about the benefits of lifelong learning and advice on how to access it
- sponsoring national conferences and by supporting relevant international conferences
- stimulating the demand for learning by sponsoring projects that raise awareness about the benefits of learning, such as Adult Learners' Weeks
- adopting a national approach to skilling ACE staff to enable them to better use IT as a tool for the delivery and management of adult education programs
- undertaking relevant research into issues facing ACE
- providing tax incentives to initiatives that enable companies to become learning organisations

Education entitlements

The introduction of universal entitlements for post-secondary education, put forward in *Learning for life: Review of higher education financing and policy* report (West 1998), is potentially a most significant proposal in terms of achieving universal participation in lifelong learning and with important consequences for ACE.

While the focus of the 1998 West report is on higher education, the report envisions Australia becoming a learning society. It urges the government to make every effort to ensure that 'all Australians of whatever social, cultural and economic background have access to a post-secondary education of excellent value' (West 1998, p. 35).

The report recommends the introduction of a 'lifelong learning entitlement'. This entitlement is to be provided to both school-leavers and mature-age students seeking access to post-secondary education and training. The report also advocates the provision of equity funds through supplementary grants and targeted at members of designated groups. The report recommends application of entitlement funding to higher education and vocational training, thus it would appear, excluding support to much of the education which occurs in ACE.

If becoming a learning society implies universal participation, then the learning entitlements must also be universal. Arguably, consideration should be given to including traditional ACE clientele—these not necessarily pursuing vocational education or not members of disadvantaged groups.

Real costs and marginal costs

The issue of cost has been identified as a significant barrier to participation. Most ACE providers operate on a non-profit, user-pays basis. However, unless they are using volunteer tutors—a common practice in some States—the cost to learners may act as a major disincentive. It follows therefore, that any move to reduce that cost is likely to increase participation.

One strategy for reducing costs was identified by stakeholders during the consultations. In instances where providers have access to government-owned facilities, such as schools and TAFE institutes, the cost for user-pays purposes should be calculated at a nominal rate. While the resultant reduction in course costs will not be sufficient to address the entire cost-related, non-participation problem it will make a difference. Policy on ACE access to schools and TAFE at cost-recovery rates already exists in some States.

The image of ACE

Both the literature and the consultations identified the lack of recognition of ACE—relative to other sectors—as an impediment to its ability to attract funding and to a lesser extent to attract students. Reasons given include the largely non-accredited nature of its courses, the standard of its facilities/equipment and the relatively lower levels of government funding it receives.

In recent years, however, there has been a noticeable improvement in the way ACE is seen by policy-makers, by members of the education community, by the general public and most importantly, by the practitioners themselves.

A significant factor in ACE's increased standing may well be the universal realisation that, in this complex and changing world, lifelong learning holds one of the keys to transforming societies into cohesive, democratic and economically viable entities. Coupled with that realisation is a belief that ACE, with its learner-centred philosophies and flexible approach to delivery, is the logical vehicle to contribute to the post-secondary component of lifelong learning.

Information technology and participation

Global information networks may well over time erode the numbers attending traditional learning environments. ACE providers will need to view the competition from on-line, global information networks and off-the-shelf, interactive CD-ROM programs, as both challenges as well as opportunities. To survive, ACE will need to consider adopting some or all of the following options:

- establishing or joining consortiums, at State or national level, in order to carve out a niche in the lucrative emerging area of courseware development

- offering a brokerage service that provides information about 'value-for-money' courses available on the information networks, as well as counselling and information support required by learners accessing the networks
- identifying and filling market gaps unlikely to be satisfied by information networks due to limited demand or because of location-specific content
- providing learning environments which combine the benefits of accessing on-line programs with the basic human need to interact with others and which, in addition, provide learners with quality support services both of a technical and educational nature

The second challenge/opportunity for ACE relates to the growing demand for education and training associated with the IT revolution. Education providers will need to meet the labour market requirements of the newly emerging IT industries and also the training needs of those people whose jobs have changed as a consequence of IT. It will also be crucial that providers are in a position to service the general public who will be required to become technology literate in order to operate effectively in the new IT world. Fryer (1997, p. 18) warns that IT also has the potential to create serious social divisions unless those who do not possess the resources to invest in the technology are provided with ready access in public places and user-friendly learning centres.

While the VET and higher education sectors have an important role to play in addressing the IT training needs of industry, the ACE sector, with its reputation for responsiveness and flexibility, is well positioned to take a significant share of the market for upskilling the existing workforce, and is demonstrating that it can be the foremost provider in meeting the IT training needs of the general public.

A bridge to VET

With the advent of the open training market, a growing number of ACE providers choose to offer accredited courses, thereby providing the community with a more comprehensive range of education and training options. For many rural communities an ACE provider may of course be the only available vocational entry point.

In terms of widening participation, the relevance of an alternative or perhaps only entry point is not just a matter of geography. For people with low self-confidence or unhappy previous education experiences the psychological barrier of entering a large, complex and formal learning institution can be just as prohibitive. By broadening ACE offerings to include a range of accredited courses, providers are moving to address this barrier thus helping to widen participation.

To offer accredited courses ACE providers can become registered in their own right. Alternatively, if they are too small or do not possess the necessary infrastructure, as is the case with many rural providers, they can choose to enter into joint venture arrangements with a registered VET provider to offer courses under licence.

Among the 180 registered ACE providers there are numerous examples where the two strands (adult general education and vocational training) successfully operate in parallel. By offering parallel programs providers are also helping to overcome the last remnants of the vocational-non-vocational dichotomy. This issue and other issues relating to VET/ACE provision are covered in greater detail in the companion papers, 'Who uses ACE: Future demand' and 'Community in ACE'.

New and extended role for ACE

To ensure that the ACE sector continues to occupy an important and meaningful role as we approach the new millennium, while at the same time increasing participation, new avenues into which it can move should be explored. Two distinct areas are worthy of consideration.

The first involves ACE broadening its program/service base, thereby increasing its market share by for example, offering accredited courses and providing consultancy services. The second involves identifying new market niches for ACE provision which are associated with the emerging industries and with the rapid changes to the workplace, the family and society. Consider the potential for adult education courses in the following areas:

- *fostering social cohesion.* In Australia in recent years, there has been a noticeable growth in social tension within sectors of the community over issues such as native title, immigration, foreign aid, open market policies and the level of welfare available to indigenous Australians. In a democracy, it is healthy to hold differing views on significant cultural and social issues. Nevertheless situations should be avoided where communities become deeply polarised.

  History informs us that when communities are going through difficult times, people look for causes and often come to simplistic conclusions based on inadequate information. For example they may attribute high levels of unemployment to immigration policies, when in fact they are a result of a range of complex factors such as the impact of IT, industry restructuring and competition policy.

  To ensure community harmony education sectors and in particular ACE are ideally placed to adopt a national educative role, aimed at providing information and understanding on some of this country's most problematic issues.

- *fostering the key competencies.* The rapid and often unpredictable changes impacting on all sectors of industry and society have meant a change in the profile of the skills and abilities most desired by employers. While employees still need to have industry-specific skills, most employers also want their staff to possess high levels of generic skills—key competencies.

  In the publication *ACE works*, McIntyre et al. (1995) note that, on the question of generic skills, a high level of correlation between the views of employers and those of ACE participants exists. Both place importance on the ability to use technology, on communication skills, on team skills and on planning and organising skills.

  The successful fostering of these skills does not require capital- intensive facilities or equipment but rather a non-formal learning environment staffed by facilitators committed to a learner-centered approach and who have access to quality, interactive learning guides. Given these requirements, it would appear that the ACE sector is well placed to cater for what will be an important and growing market.

- *making information and communication technology accessible.* Ongoing changes to information technology threaten to exclude a growing number of Australians from accessing facilities and services within the community. Providing appropriate information and skill-enhancing courses in a non-threatening, user-friendly environment would do much to raise the level of technological literacy in this country, another important role for ACE.

- *ACE for small business.* Collectively, small businesses represent the largest employer group in Australia. Individually they are usually too small to have the capacity to undertake education and training for their staff. Moreover, the nature of small business generally makes it difficult to release staff to attend the local VET provider.

  Yet the need for education and training in areas such as office and management skills, marketing, customer service, basic accounting, quality assurance and occupational health welfare and safety is well recognised by the government and the industry.

  Since ACE providers are located in most regional communities across the country and learning packages on a wide range of small business programs are available, ACE is well positioned to make a significant contribution to the training of this sector.

- *training the growing numbers of volunteers.* While there has been a reduction in the number of volunteers in some paramedical and emergency service areas over recent years, there is still a significant demand for trained volunteer workers.

  In a speech to the Sydney Institute, Cheryl Kernot (1998) noted the important part voluntary work plays in the lives of Australians over age 45, particularly those without jobs. She proposes that governments do more to recognise the valuable contribution made by volunteers to the community through the establishment of a National Volunteer Management Program, a program designed to assist volunteers to better understand their roles and responsibilities and to perform their duties.

  ACE, with its strong community networks and with assistance from government departments, is ideally placed to provide education and training for volunteer workers. The ACE sector itself has a long tradition of using volunteers drawn from adults who possess a lifetime of knowledge and experience which they are keen to share with others.

The above programs do not depend for their delivery on expensive, purpose-built facilities or equipment. They do need to be flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of adult learners. Moreover, they require access to friendly learning environments that place an emphasis on learners achieving their own goals, rather than fulfilling the requirements of an externally imposed credential. The prerequisites for these new market niches accord with the defining characteristics of ACE.

Topics research

Study time entitlement—The notion of study time entitlements has been discussed as a key strategy for overcoming the cost barrier to participation in ACE. It would be useful to have access to UK research which:

- reported on the process used to introduce the concept
- commented on the level of success in addressing participation rates
- speculated on its likely future
- commented on its relevance to the Australian situation

Planning at State level—Undertaking research analysing the various strategic plans and policy statements produced by States for the provision of ACE could prove to be valuable in the development of national ACE strategies to increase participation.

Funding general adult education—The costs associated with general adult education courses, usually offered on a fee-for-service basis, are identified as a major barrier to participation for low-income families, the unemployed and pensioners. Fee concessions can be an important intervention strategy for ensuring participation by these groups. Several stakeholders indicated support for a research project that would:

- look at the different funding mechanisms operating across the States
- consider the relevance of concessions in helping the government realise its commitment to lifelong learning
- report on the prevalence of cross-subsidisation within the States
- identify the gap between the government allocation and the demand for concessions
- provide proposals for pricing and concession policies, which are consistent, fair and administratively simple to manage

Systemic barriers to participation—Much has been written about the barriers to participation in ACE. However, barriers at systems level have not received the attention in Australia that they have in the United Kingdom, where they are considered to number among the more serious inhibitors. Consideration should be given to undertaking research aimed at identifying the impact on participation of issues such as:

- organisational structures and enrolment procedures
- the use of acronyms and jargon in marketing and information materials
- the lack of coherence among education sectors and among different providers within sectors
- the availability and appropriateness of information
- the availability and appropriateness of counselling
- the complexities of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

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Appendix 1: Acronyms

AAACE	Australian Association of Adult and Community Education
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACEC	Adult and Community Education Council
ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
ACFEB	Adult, Community and Further Education Board
ACFED	Adult, Community and Further Education Division
AMEP	Adult Multicultural Education Program
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AVETMISS	Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistics Standard
BACE	Board of Adult and Community Education
CAE	Council for Adult Education
CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DETAFE	Department of Training and Further Education
IT	Information Technology
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAGCELL	National Advisory Group for Continuing and Lifelong Learning
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTFE	Office of Training and Further Education
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TASTA	Tasmanian State Training Authority
U3A	University of the Third Age
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEET	Vocational Education, Employment and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETA	Vocational Education Training Authority (ACT)
VETEC	Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission
WEA	Workers' Educational Association

Notes

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

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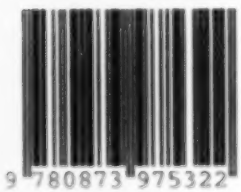

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